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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

The Making of Gender in Egyptian Families: A cross-class engagement

A Thesis Submitted by

Farah M. Atia

Submitted to the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies

November 2015

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Gender and Women's Studies
in Middle East/ North Africa

Gendered Political Economies specialization

has been approved by

Dr. Martina Rieker _____
Thesis Adviser
Affiliation: IGWS
Date _____

Dr. Malak Rouchdy _____
Thesis Second Reader
Affiliation: SAPE
Date _____

Dr. Munira Khayyat _____
Thesis Third Reader
Affiliation: SAPE
Date _____

Dr. Martina Rieker _____
Department Chair
Date _____

Nabil Fahmy, Ambassador _____
Dean of GAPP
Date _____

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Abstract

In the midst of an unstable political environment, a booming population, and a neoliberal atmosphere, it is impossible not to notice the wide socio-economic disparities in the urban capital of Cairo. 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima is clogged with "informal" buildings contained by its old medieval structure (Sims, 2003, p. 6). It has been suggested by Sims (2003, p. 6) that most families residing in this area, where buildings frequently collapse, belong to the lower-income strata of the society. Nevertheless, I have not found it useful nor accurate to assume that the inhabitants of 'Ishash Kum Ghurab belong to a particular socio-economic categorization. The idea of socio-economic class is fluid and it is not possible to assign families from certain communities to pre-defined class categories. Zamalek, one of Cairo's most affluent areas, is only a thirty-minute drive away from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab. Overlooking the Nile, the area hosts a large number of cafes, restaurants, bars, yoga studios, the Cairo Opera House, and is where most embassies are located. Again, while many of the Zamalek residents could be said to belong to the upper-middle and upper classes, it is not possible to assign them a particular pre-determined class category. However, I could not ignore the apparent socio-economic gap among the families I have spoken with in each of those areas, and within this condition of socio-economic disparity, gender as a system of power, with all the meanings attached to it, is continuously produced, reproduced and contested within families. In the light of the above, this thesis looks at the dominant gender ideologies produced within Egyptian families in both areas along with the ways in which they are simultaneously deployed and contested. My motivation to engage in this cross-class exploration is not based on an assumption that families with different socioeconomic conditions hold dramatically different definitions, articulations, and meanings of gender. Rather, the idea of class enables me to engage in a more inclusive and comprehensive exploration of how gender, as a category of difference, is constructed and contested. In line with my initial hypothesis, my research has revealed that families in the two areas do not hold substantially contrasting ideas and understandings of gender. Yet, this cross-class exploration has enabled me to comprehensively explore how various elements tied to the category of class (such as income, survival strategies, neighborhood dynamics and exposure to dominant modernist narratives) influence how gender is produced, reproduced, upheld and challenged in those two areas. This thesis entails comprehensive interviews with five women and three men from each of the two areas in which the intricate gendered power relations within the family are carefully explored and analyzed. Importantly, through employing ethnographic research focusing on families in two socio-economically distinct areas, this thesis attempts to fill a critical research gap as most (if not all) ethnographies on the Egyptian household tend to solely focus on lower-income communities.

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview: Thesis Questions

My thesis attempts to explore the following question: What are the dominant gender ideologies produced within Egyptian families and how are they deployed and contested? Furthermore, to draw on Charlebois, how do individuals affirm, reject or potentially reconfigure subject positions or social identities suggested by gender discourses, and how, in the process, do they construct and re-construct gendered subjectivities? (2014, p. 27). I am particularly looking at the way in which gender is produced, reproduced, and transformed among families in economically and socially distinct areas, 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima, and Zamalek.

My motivation to engage in this cross-class exploration is not based on an assumption that families with different socioeconomic conditions hold dramatically different definitions, articulations, and meanings of gender. Rather, the idea of class enables me to engage in a more inclusive and comprehensive exploration of how gender, as a category of difference, is constructed. It is the various elements involved in the making of the category of class that may impact how gender is constructed within and through the family. The dynamics surrounding the concept of class may affect the production of gender ideologies in different ways- income, survival strategies, opportunities, geographical location are all elements tied to class and can impact the way in which gender is produced and reinforced. Also, and because the family does not exist in isolation, I imagine that migration, urban desires, political and economic elements along with other dynamics might impact the produced gender ideologies. Importantly, it is worth noting that I did not select the spaces of 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima, and Zamalek based on an assumption that the socio-economic conditions in each of those two areas are directly contrasting. In fact, the category of class is highly fluid and I have not found it feasible nor appropriate to

assign particular class categories to the inhabitants of each of those areas. My aim, nevertheless, was to engage with individuals residing in areas with different historical and social genealogies in an attempt to look at how those differences might have affected the gender ideologies produced and reproduced within families.

More specifically, I attempt to answer the following questions: Based on a critical analysis of the narratives of family members in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab and Zamalek, how is gender and power understood within the family? How do families *do* gender? How is this translated in the ways in which older family members interact with children? What are the changes in the dominant gender ideologies that occurred through and were lived throughout the lifetimes of Egyptian families in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab and Zamalek? How is gender changing and transforming? In what ways do women and men attempt to contest the prevalent understandings of gender? How is the fluidity of gender reflected in the everyday lives of families and in their stories? What differences are observed across interlocutors from different generations, and what does this say about the ever-changing nature of gender?

Research Problem, Context, Justification

In the midst of an unstable political environment, a booming population, and a neoliberal atmosphere, it is impossible not to notice the wide socio-economic disparities in the urban capital of Cairo. Egypt's desert landscape has resulted in geographic limitations and land scarcity, and a concentration of its population around the banks of the river Nile (Gugler, 2004, p. 125). The valley and the delta of the Nile, representing only 5% of Egypt's total land, are overly populated (Ibrahim, 1996, p. 125). Egypt's population growth has been uncontrollable; from a population of around 5 million in 1800, to 10 million in 1900, to over 80 million inhabitants today, most of which have settled around the Nile (p. 125). It is estimated that around 45% of Egypt's population live in slums

(OCHA/IRIN, 2007), many of which are rural-to-urban migrants with little education, skill, or financial resources.

‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima is clogged with “informal” buildings contained by its old medieval structure (Sims, 2003, p. 6). It has been suggested by Sims (2003, p. 6) that most families residing in this area, where buildings frequently collapse, belong to the lower-income strata of the society. Nevertheless, I have not found it useful nor accurate to assume that inhabitants of ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab (or Zamalek, for that matter) belong to a particular socio-economic categorization. The idea of socio-economic class is fluid and it is not possible to assign families from certain communities to pre-defined class categories. Zamalek, one of Cairo’s most affluent areas, is only a thirty-minute drive away from ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab. Overlooking the Nile, the area hosts a large number of cafes, restaurants, bars, yoga studios, the Cairo Opera House, and is where most embassies are located. Again, while many of the Zamalek residents might be said to belong to the upper-middle and upper classes, it is not possible to assign them a particular pre-determined class category. However, I could not ignore the apparent socio-economic gap among the families I have spoken with in each of those areas, and within this condition of socio-economic disparity, numerous discourses- including gender discourses- are constructed, reproduced, deployed, and challenged. As geographically proximate as ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab and Zamalek residents may be, the socio-economic gap between them motivates me to explore the gender ideologies produced, upheld and contested within those neighborhoods. The dynamics surrounding the concept of class may affect the production of gender ideologies in different ways- income, survival strategies, opportunities, geographical location are all elements tied to class and can impact the way in which gender is produced and reinforced. While there is a number of ethnographies on Egyptian families, they mostly focus on the economic and the political, and none of these works directly address how

gender ideologies are constructed, or how gender, as a category of difference is produced and upheld. Moreover, as we will see in the literature review section, most ethnographies- if not all- focus on lower income communities. Ethnographers have had a tendency to focus on lower-income households, as opposed to middle/higher-income households, resulting in a fair amount of quality ethnography on lower income households and almost none on middle/higher-income households. This has resulted in the construction of *Sha'by* (popular) Communities as a “zone” in ethnographic work on the Egyptian household, to draw on Abu-Lughod (1989). The most significant and comprehensive ethnographies about the Egyptian household, Hoodfar’s book entitled, *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate politics and survival in Cairo* (1997), Singerman and Hoodfar’s book, *Development, Change, and Gender in Cairo: A View from the Household* (1996) and Singerman’s *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (1995), all focus on lower-income households. While I see how those communities stimulate curiosity, given their marginalized position, I believe the field requires a fresh perspective that takes into account other layers of the Egyptian population.

In the process of exploring the dominant gender ideologies produced in two economically distinct urban areas, I choose to particularly focus on the impact of the family in gender ideology production. The family is an important site through which the social is reproduced, and upheld, as Bourdieu puts it, “the family plays a decisive role in the maintenance of the social order, through social as well as biological reproduction, i.e. reproduction of the structure of the social space and social relations” (1996, p. 23). The centrality of the family to Egypt’s social structure cannot be doubted, and it is highly unlikely for individuals to live in separation from the family. The dependence of family members on one another, based on what Singerman calls “the familial ethos,” persuades individuals to follow family norms (1995, p. 67). The significance of the Arab

family in constructing the ideas of its members is frequently underscored in literature (Mensch, et al., 2003). The family is continually reproduced as it holds “normative preferences, economic activities, cultural values, symbols, and the social structure of the community” (Singerman, 1995, p. 74). My hypothesis is that, through this process of family reproduction, gender ideologies are simultaneously reproduced, deployed and upheld. This, in turn, helps create a gendered society where the gender binary, with all labels and implications attached to it, is the norm. My conjecture is that gender ideologies are dynamic and fluid: they vary not only between social classes but also within classes. Finally, income, survival strategies, opportunities, migration, geographical location, urban desires, political and economic macro and micro forces might all influence the produced gender ideologies, and are of significance to my cross-class project.

Literature Review

My thesis attempts to explore the dominant gender ideologies produced within and through Egyptian families. My question about the production of gender revolves around three major themes: the family, gender as a social construction, and class. Bourdieu (1996) describes the family as, “a set of individuals linked either by alliance (marriage) or filiation, or less commonly, by adoption (legal relationship), and living under the same roof (cohabitation)” (p. 19). Bourdieu writes about the assumptions related to the family discourse made by ethno-methodologists who consider the discourse to be a political philosophy that establishes a “valorized” arrangement of social relations. Of particular importance to my project is the first assumption that he puts forward:

Through a kind of anthropomorphism, in which the properties of an individual are attributed to a group, the family is seen as a reality transcending its members, a transpersonal person endowed with a common life and spirit and a particular vision of the world. (p. 20).

Similar to gender (to be discussed shortly), the family can be considered as a social construction (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 20). Not only that, but also this notion of construction itself is a social

construction, and is collectively upheld by all instruments socialized in a certain manner (p. 21). This collective belief and classification is what Bourdieu refers to as *nomos*. The reason why it is a shared belief is that we were all socialized to accept it as true in a universe that is based on family divisions (p. 21). This fundamental construction is a basic component of our *habitus*, “a mental structure which, having been inculcated into all brains socialized in a particular way, is both individual and collective” (p. 21). Thus, it can be said that the family as an “objective” social division is the foundation of the family as a “subjective” social division (p. 21). This represents the way in which social order is reproduced (p. 21). “The near-perfect match that is then set up between the subjective and objective categories” sets the basis for experiencing a palpable world (p. 21). The family appears to be the most natural and universal element in this world though it is a mere subjective social construct (p. 21).

The making of gender most powerfully occurs within the family (Blume and Blume, 2003, p. 786). Conscious and unconscious communication from parents to children with regards to parents’ ideas about gender has the greatest influence, Blume and Blume explain (p. 786). Familial communications and relations frequently expose unspoken beliefs about gender that facilitate the family’s construction of common conceptions of the prevailing discourse of gender (Bem, 1993 and Coltrane, 1998). Moreover, parents’ perceptions of gender are usually adopted by children—whether these perceptions are an acceptance or rejection of the prevalent discourse of gender (Blume and Blume, 2003, p. 786). There is almost no previous research that looks into the different ways in which gender is reproduced in Egyptian families. However, a number of authors have provided insight into the Egyptian family with a focus on gender.

In her book entitled, *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate politics and survival in Cairo* (1997), Hoodfar focuses on the economy of the Egyptian household. Hoodfar looks into the

survival strategies adopted by households of the lower income strata in newly urbanized areas (p. 16). Rather than studying the “emotional” and “ideological” elements of the everydayness, Hoodfar’s attention goes to the economic and material elements in the household (p. 16). Specifically, she looks into material contributions and the allocation of economic benefits (p. 16). Furthermore, Hoodfar highlights the factors related to the Egyptian economy and culture that have an impact on the survival tactics of the family, and the effect of socio-economic dynamics on gender relations (p. 17). Most importantly, this book is a profound anthropological ethnography that provides some insight on gender roles. For example, in chapter 2, Hoodfar raises the issue of marriage and gender roles, along with the traditional and legal rights and obligations of each partner. She particularly highlights the different tactics through which women and their families “manipulate” certain traditions to avoid some restrictions on women (p. 19). Hoodfar argues that parents play a significant role in daughters’ marriage arrangements even in less “traditional” families (p. 19). She also discusses the idea of men being the main breadwinners, and how this puts pressure on young men to earn more (p. 19).

In Singerman and Hoodfar’s book, *Development, Change, and Gender in Cairo: A View from the Household* (1996), a variety of essays on the role of the household in Egypt’s social construction, political and economic life in the period from 1984 to 1994 are presented. The book focuses on lower class communities in greater Cairo, especially the families who have once been members of the lower middle class but have endured a decline in economic status. Importantly, the authors argue that the household is an important site that facilitates relations and networks between individuals, the larger community, the market, and the state (p. xi). The book refers to the numerous factors that contribute to producing ideas about gender, and gender roles, that should not be overlooked when studying the family. Singerman and Hoodfar state that “structural forces

such as the ideology of the state, industrialization, changing labor market conditions, the state's distribution of public goods, and patterns of income distribution clearly influence individuals and gender roles" (p. xii). They explain that Egypt's political and economic dynamics have had a significant influence on the gender roles and the gendered division of labor within the household (p.xii). Actual and perceived household needs, they argue, are the root of numerous contemporary issues, and relations within the household are a fundamental variable in development (p. xix). For instance, because the contemporary labor market requires technical labor, boys are encouraged to leave school and join traineeship programs in order to help bring extra income to the family (p. xix). At the same time, girls might have the opportunity to continue to attend school because there are fewer work opportunities available for them (p. xix). Moreover, wives might be persuaded to stay home and focus on reproductive work, and young men might temporarily migrate to the Gulf for low-skilled work that would enable them to save up for marriage (p. xix).

Another significant book engaging with the family in Egypt is Singerman's *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (1995). Singerman's point of focus is Cairo's popular or *sha'by* areas and how those living there seek alternative ways to access resources outside the formal route of the state, through networks built through family or neighbors. She argues that rather than assuming that the *sha'by* population has been "brutally repressed, co-opted, or have grown apathetic and acquiescent, socialized into accepting elite domination," those peoples take part in various practices that carry "political import and aggregate power for collective benefit" (p. 3). Singerman explains that though the majority of Egyptians might have been dismissed from the official political ground, they have nevertheless succeeded in creating unofficial political organizations to work for their own interests (p. 3). While gender ideology production is definitely not one of Singerman's focal points, she provides a rich

ethnography on the family. She writes about “familial ethos,” and how it is upheld in *sha‘by* communities (p. 67). Social interaction and the variety of celebrations shared by family members reproduce the traditions of the “familial ethos” through stressing the importance of inter-family dependence, cooperation, and intimacy (p. 67). Furthermore, in her prolonged discussion about the reproduction of the family, she looks into different traditional practices related to marriage, and notes that gender relations and sexual behavior are not homogenous across the *sha‘by* community, as represented by some scholars, but rather heterogeneous, dynamic and changing (p. 75). This does not mean that communities do not try to uphold ideals on matters related to gender, sexuality, and honor, but that those ideals are locally challenged by alternative models and ideas (p. 75).

A study by Mensch, et al. (2003) on gender-role attitudes among Egyptian adolescents provides some insight on the prevalent gender discourse in the Egyptian society. Similar to the majority of countries in the Middle East, Egypt’s men are expected to be controlling of women (Davis and Davis, 1989 and Kandiyoti, 1994 as cited in Mensch, et al., 2003, p. 8). They are expected to preserve the prevalent gender roles in society, and to appear emotionally detached from women and children (p. 8). On the other hand, women are presumed to show submission and to abide by societal and familial gender roles. They are expected to be more emotional and affectionate than the men (Rugh, 1997 as cited in Mensch, et al., 2003, p. 8). As a result of these expectations, girls and boys are socialized in different ways (p. 10). For example, while both girls and boys are assumed to take part in domestic responsibilities as children, girls are expected to take on more tasks than boys (p. 10). As boys approach mid-adolescence, they slowly give up these duties as they move towards “manhood,” a state characterized by the male’s distance from women and children, and their related domestic responsibilities (p. 10). Moreover, according to Mensch, et al., it is a norm in Egyptian culture for men and women live with their parents/families before marriage

(p. 10). Not only that, but it is widely accepted for parents to support their children both financially and emotionally until they are married off (p. 10).

The next theme around which my research question is based is the social construction of gender. Before conceptualizing gender as a social construct, I would like to take one step back to examine the term “Social Constructionism.” In the social sciences, social constructionism is sloppily used to denote any social impact on the experience of the individual (DeLamater and Hyde, 1998, p. 13). Nevertheless, it is more aptly employed to denote a particular “theoretical paradigm” (p. 13). This theoretical paradigm, in principal, assumes that “reality is socially constructed,” as Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 1) put it. Gender as a social construct is among the most significant themes studied by social constructionists (see Bohan 1993, Lorber & Farrell, 1991 and Unger, 1989). A misunderstanding commonly held about the social construction of gender is that it denotes the socialization into gendered roles and traits, Bohan (1993) argues. Gender socialization is the process through which children develop ideas about gender roles and gender identity (Stockard, 1999, p. 215). It refers to the different ways in which young people pick up prevalent roles and expectations linked to the sex binary, as well as the self-identity related to a certain sex group (p. 215). Gender as a social construct, however, is a much more complicated process (DeLamater and Hyde, 1998, p. 16). Viewing gender as a mere attribute is an essentialist way of classification (p. 16). Rather, social constructionists view gender as a “process external to the individual. Gender is defined by interactions between people, by language, and by the discourse of a culture” (p. 16).

Lorber (1994) examines gender as a social institution, a process, and as a component of a stratification system. As a process, gender is produced through social interaction where individuals acquire the different acts that are expected of them (p. 60). This, in turn, creates and upholds the

gender order (p. 60). Importantly, Lorber (1994) argues that gender is produced within virtually every human interaction- this can either be a reproduction of gender norms or a rejection of those norms. Gendered parenting, sexuality, and work practices in different phases of an individual's life form gendered "patterns of interaction" (p. 60). The informal policing of gender practices occurring on a daily basis impose gendered customs and construct a model of what is appropriate gender behavior (p. 60).

West and Zimmerman (1987) offer a more developed argument on this point in their piece, "Doing Gender." Their argument holds that, "gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort" (p. 129). The social doing of gender is more complex than the reproduction of gender connotations through human interaction: gender itself is created through this interaction (p. 129). Similar to Bohan (1993) and DeLamater and Hyde (1998), West and Zimmerman (1987) oppose the established theories of gender socialization as they describe gender as something rigid, fixed, and stable (p. 126). Moreover, those theories are seen to have an "ahistorical and depoliticizing focus" (Thorne, 1980, p. 9). Importantly, socialization theories are criticized of assuming that individuals prefer to uphold and reinforce prevailing norms (Connell 1985, p. 263).

In her book entitled, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler offers another manifestation of the social construction of gender. Butler argues that there is no longer a fixed conception of "woman" as a subject. There is also no general consent on what makes up the division of women (1990). Beauvoir contends that, "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one," and this becoming, she explains, is a result of cultural pressure (Beauvoir 1949, 2:13). According to Butler, though gender cannot be said to be a noun, it is not a collection of boundless characteristics, primarily because it is produced through a set of performances forced by governing

systems of “gender coherence” (p. 24-25). “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being,” she argues (p. 33). She explains that the obligation to become a certain gender occurs through “discursive” paths, for example, to be a good wife, daughter, or employee (p. 145).

The final theme around which my research revolves is the concept of class. Class is a highly influential element which should not be ignored. Class inquiry holds that “class is a pervasive social cause, and thus it is worth exploring its ramifications for many social phenomena, but not that it is universally the most important” (Wright, 1997, p. 1). Cairo’s new spatial structure that greatly evolved over the last three decades is a shadow of the wide socioeconomic divide and the unequal distribution of wealth that exist (Adham, 2005). A major critique of globalization and neoliberalism is the growing socioeconomic division within society (Adham, 2005). As Chau (2002) argues, it can be noticed that in countries where neoliberal practices were introduced, wealth has been channeled to the capitalist elite and was not extended to the rest of the population. Harvey argues that there are two ways in which we can view neoliberalism: a “utopian project,” that offers a hypothetical model to reorganize global capitalism, or a “political project,” that aims at recreating the environment for the accumulation of wealth and reestablishing class power (2006a). The latter purpose has triumphed over the former, he contends. Neoliberalism as a political project did remake the conditions for the accumulation of capital and reinstating class power, and the hypothetical utopian objective of neoliberalism has acted as a way to naturalize and legitimize the different tactics that were put forward for the sake of reinstating class power (Harvey, 2006a). Once neoliberal ideals cease to work in favor of the aforementioned political class project, they are simply discarded (Harvey, 2006a).

It can be said that the making and organization of capitalist spaces is subject to the restructuring of relations of power that preexist (Bogaert, 2013). The urban is an important site through which those relations of power can be observed. As Harvey (2008, p. 23) writes, “Urbanization has always been, a class phenomenon, since surpluses are extracted from somewhere and somebody, while the control over their disbursement typically lies in a few hands.” It would be simplistic to merely divide urban spaces into upper class communities, on one hand, and lower class communities on the other. However, it is worth considering how the organization of urban spaces could provide useful insight about prevalent socio-economic conditions. Notably, many of the individuals whom I spoke with in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab have referred to their neighborhood as “*’ashwaiyyat*,” a term which emerged to refer to shantytowns, slums, and illegitimate satellite cities established by the lower-income stratum of the population (Denis, 2006). In fact, during the second half of the 1990s, the term “*’ashwaiyyat*” has transcended its initial meaning that signifies a place and began to signify people as well, where it implies the “dangerous” stratum of the population (Denis, 2006). The category of “*sha’by*,” whether used to refer to people or neighborhoods, has also been employed in the same context, and has been repetitively used by many of my interlocutors in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima to refer to themselves and to their neighbors. As the state turned its back on public housing, and with the market for higher-end real-estate continuing to expand, the market for informal housing that builds affordable accommodation began to thrive (Denis, 2008). A tremendous chunk of the population resides in the so-called *’ashwaiyyat*. Such informal settlements have become normalized starting the 1990s, a time of heavy privatization of public land. According to Denis, there is little dispute with the government over the existence of the *’ashwaiyyat* and, in some instances, the state legitimizes such “illegal” settlements within a neoliberal framework. It is evident that the reproduction of the

'ashwaiyyat cannot cease unless the persistent and prevalent neo-liberalization process is interrupted (Denis, 2008). The *'ashwaiyyat*, according to Denis, were even transformed into a profitable market for the steel and cement industries, and have thus, become instruments for capital accumulation themselves.

Conceptual Framework

As a recapitulation, my question brings together three main elements: the family, gender as a social construction, and class, with a sensitivity to underlying structural forces. The family, as an institution, influences gender ideologies produced and reproduced within it. Specifically within the Egyptian context, it is highly unlikely for the individual to exist in separation from the family. While alternative forms to the traditional family do exist, they are considered as exceptions that deviate from the norm. Such deviations are likely to be met with punishment, and attempts to discipline the deviated subject. Furthermore, the family is seen as the “ideal” model, and its reproduction is seen as crucial. Besides acting as an agent to social regulation, the family provides a safe environment for individuals where emotional and financial support is provided and shared. As mentioned earlier, it is not uncommon for both men and women to reside with their parents until marriage, since parents offer financial and emotional support. But that does not mean that individuals automatically reproduce gender beliefs upheld by family members, but they actively choose to uphold or contest those beliefs, as my research will show.

Gender is a dynamic, fluid process, a social construct, and a power system. While some individuals may exercise various modes of resistance against the gendered system of power, others choose to maintain prevailing arrangements and positions. This phenomenon ought to be studied with an open mind: while gender is a dynamic process that is constantly constructed throughout human interaction, it is also possible that at times, people choose to reproduce existing gender

norms for a variety of reasons. I do not see this as a blind reproduction of a system of domination, but as a multifaceted process that entails multiple complexities. Thus, it is worth looking at the various elements involved in the reproduction of particular gender ideologies, or in their contestation. Specifically, it is worth asking: How are gender ideologies changing and transforming? Are some individuals against the prevalent understandings of gender? Do some individuals try to change those understandings? What forms of resistance exist? Importantly, I do not consider the making of gendered hierarchies as a product of a patriarchal process where men are in control of women. What if some women are not only accepting the gender discourse, but also actively reinforcing it? What if it works for them? What if they are able to use this discourse for mutually beneficial negotiation?

Finally, my consideration of class as an important variable is not an assumption that families occupying different socioeconomic positions are involved in the production of contrasting gender ideologies. Rather, class makes way for a more inclusive and comprehensive exploration of how gender, as a category of difference, is constructed and upheld. What I attempt to explore is not whether the two socially and economically disparate communities produce different ideas about gender, but rather, how different elements involved in the making of the category of class, including income, socioeconomic status, geographical location, etc. impact the production of gender ideologies. I am not assuming that Zamalek families, given a particular presumed educational background, can inevitably be considered as resistant to the prevalent gender discourses. In fact, and as this project hopes to show, there are countless ways through which gender manifests itself, it cannot be reduced to a set of values that are shared among families living in a particular community. Gender, and the relations of power tied to it, is highly fluid, variable and ever-changing.

As a final note, when looking at class vis-à-vis income level and geographical location, it is worth considering that some average-income families might continue to reside in houses that they have owned or rented for years in “upper-class” neighborhoods. Some of those families might have begun renting or have purchased their houses long before Cairo’s housing market began to show tremendous price hikes. Similarly, average-income families might be forced to move to “informal” settlements like ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab due to the soaring housing market. In other words, geographical location does not automatically indicate a particular socio-economic or class category.

Methodology and Fieldwork

My primary method of data collection is interviews. I interviewed both men and women who have children in two areas, ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima and Zamalek. My interviews turned out rather comprehensive, partly as a result of prolonged and repeated visits to the two areas where my research was conducted. My access to ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab comes from a local NGO that works in the area and that has strong ties with families living there. Guided by someone who has lived there for years, and who is both part of the community and the NGO, I visited families in the comfort of their homes. I tried my best to reduce being seen as a complete outsider, which made me quite anxious at first. I was commonly harassed by young boys on the street, who spoke English to me despite me being Egyptian. Nevertheless, I was surprised to see how welcoming people were when I visited their homes. My anxiety soon disappeared when both the women and men opened up to me, sharing some of their deepest secrets, desires and fears. I felt that being seen as an outsider to their community actually made them more comfortable sharing their experiences and emotions with me. After a few visits, I became friends with *Soha*, one of the women in my ethnographic study, who began leaving her kids with me to babysit as she performed

house chores. My access to families in Zamalek was based on networking, but I refrained from speaking to people that I know in order to try to achieve the same degree of coverage that I have with families in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab. People welcomed me in their houses, and took me to the Gezira club to meet their friends and chat over coffee. Given the nature of my research question, I attempted to make the interviews more of a conversation than a formal interview. I was particularly inspired by how Valentine conducted his ethnography in his book, *Imagining Transgender: Ethnography of a Category* (2007). Valentine shaped his project around what he encountered in the field, rather than trying to adjust his data according to certain assumptions he had in mind. Every experience he encountered, and every person he interacted with, helped mold how he conceptualized his project, and how his project conceived the individuals he conducted his fieldwork with. To the best of my ability, I tried to avoid proving the initial hypotheses I had in mind, which turned out to be quite inaccurate. Rather, I slowly began to reshape my ideas according to the people I met.

Prior to starting with my fieldwork, and as a result of my own assumptions, I was concerned that due to cultural constraints, I would not be able to speak to the men residing in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab without the wives' presence. I was worried that if I had to interview both the wife and the husband at the same time, I will not be able to get deeper responses, and thus, I expected the research to be mainly focused on women. While it is true that I was able to speak to more women than men, the men whom I interviewed were surprisingly open and willing to share their deepest thoughts. My access to the cultural NGO in Misr Al-Qadima, Darb 1718 Contemporary Art and Cultural Center, enabled me to gain access to a network of men from the area who invited me to their homes and allowed me to sit with them privately in the living room, with their wives frequently coming in to serve me coke and cake, and to check in on how we are progressing. One

of the men preferred to meet me at the cultural center in the area, instead of his house. Because I was able to speak to more women than men in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, I did the same with my Zamalek ethnographic work. Furthermore, I felt that because I am a woman, some men had a general tendency to conceal certain dynamics and attempted to maintain a certain image of themselves being the most powerful in the family. This, however, was more prevalent among men in Zamalek. I was surprised to see that men from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab were much more open than their Zamalek counterparts. During the time of my presence in my interlocutors' homes, I had the chance to observe how discourses of gender are deployed in practice, particularly with regards to how parents directly treat and communicate with each other and their children. I interviewed sixteen people, eight in each area. From every eight individuals I spoke to in each area, five are women and three are men. I chose to rather establish familiarity and obtain deeper and more comprehensive narratives from a smaller number of individuals, than to obtain a large number of rather superficial responses from a bigger number of respondents. I recorded my data using a recording type, and took field notes.

My fieldwork took place between August 2014 and May 2015. I put together two guiding sets of questions- an English and an Arabic version- to provide a general idea of what I am looking for, but I tried to explore where the conversations took me regardless of the questions I already had in mind. I interviewed people residing in the two areas simultaneously, while trying, to the best of my ability, to place my biases aside. As much as I was able to, I tried to proceed to the field with an open mind, and let the field decide what I can and cannot do.

Conceptual considerations, Organization and Chapters

Butler (1988) draws on De Beauvoir's statement that, "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman," to argue that gender is by no means a fixed identity nor a specific position of agency

which cause different acts and practices to take place, but is a form of identity that is formed as a person sort of artificially repeats certain performances (p. 519). Moreover, because gender is constructed “through the stylization of the body,” it should be comprehended as the mode through which bodily representations, performances and signals create the delusion of an eternal “gendered-self” (p. 519). Through this conceptualization of gender, we can depart from an understanding of gender as based upon an archetype of identity (p. 519). The “social audience” that one encounters in the everyday, along with the performing subjects, begins to have belief in the “performative” achievement (p. 519). Importantly, and according to this logic, since the basis of gender identity formation is an artificial reiteration of performances rather than a coherent identity, the prospects of gender reworking lies in the likelihood of an altered way of repetition, the rupture or the “subversive” reiteration of that performative act (p. 519). When asked about what comes to her mind upon hearing the term “gender,” Salma, a twenty-nine-year old married woman with two children from Zamalek, said:

Society always dictates how people see gender and gender roles. In Egypt, people have very specific ideas about what gender is, about what women should do, about what men should do. Gender roles are a huge part of Egyptian society and culture. We are born thinking that women- that’s the general tendency- should get married, not work, raise the family and that’s it. Men, they graduate, they go to school and then they support the family. We come from a patriarchal society where boys and men can get away with murder, they can get away with absolutely anything and everything and girls don’t get away with anything. For me personally, I don’t really see gender, I never really make a difference between men and women, I never really notice the difference. Obviously I identify as a girl but I never...in terms of gender roles and what society dictates, and how and why women should behave in a certain way, I don’t really see this. I just think that you should do whatever makes you happy regardless of your gender. I fully understand the way our society perceives women, I just choose to act the way that makes me comfortable, I don’t feel like I need to buy in or follow or do what society says we should do because I think that if all women choose to do that they are just going to be miserable. Gender is a very flexible, fluid idea and it needs to be defined by each and every woman the way she sees it and the way that makes her comfortable. (Personal interview, November 2014).

Perhaps Salma was able to give me a well-constructed response because she holds a master's degree in sociology. For most women and men in my study, including Salma herself as I have come to know, "gender" as a term is mentally tied to "gender roles" and synonymous with "sex." Moreover, many men and women perceive gender as an identity. Importantly, some women and men in my ethnographic study explained how they understood gender in a way that almost contradicted with how they *do* gender. Salma, for example, saw gender as fluid and flexible yet, as I will present in the following chapter, she tied certain meanings and roles to each gender and implied their fixation. At times, the opposite was also true; while some of the women and men tried to explain how gender is a fixed concept that they inherited, and that they intend to pass on to their children, the accounts of their lives mostly point to the exact opposite. Through my exploration of the ways in which women and men in Zamalek and 'Ishash Kum Ghurab understand and perform gender within the family, I came to recognize the fluidity of gender and its nature as an unstable category. Because gender is a social construct, and is produced through virtually every human interaction, as Lorber (1994) argues, it constantly shifts even if individuals try to resist this shifting. Additionally, in order to bypass the conceptual obstacle that most people in my study saw "gender" as synonymous with "sex," and given that gender is but a stratification system and an implication of particular relations of power, I had my interlocutors reflect on how they understand gender in the family, but also on how they view power in the family.

While it can be said that the various decision making processes that couples partake in as well as the products of those processes provide insight about the modes of construction of power and gender in families and in the larger society (Zvonkovic et al., 1996, p. 92), power cannot be reduced to decision making, something which many of the men and women I spoke with tended to do. In order to transcend that limited view of power, I have found it useful to turn to Foucault

for an extended view of power. As he argues, “The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others” (1982, p. 788). A relationship of power exerts influence on others’ “actions,” whether those actions are taking place in the present moment or may take place at a later moment (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). Power relations, thus, should be examined from a non-simplistic perspective which looks at the various modes through which family members affect each other’s actions. Moreover, as Foucault has argued in volume I of *Histoire de La Sexualité*, power and resistance occur simultaneously (1978, p. 95), and thus, it can be said that power is not merely about relations of domination, but it is an active force. Finally, I would like to lay out an important consideration: for most people, gender discourse and power relations within the family were primarily understood within a framework of heterosexual marriage, and were closely tied to gender roles and monetized labor. But even so, deeper meanings can be extracted from what people said and did, as I will show in the following chapters.

Initially, I had broken down my inquiry about gendered power relations within the family, along with the ways in which they evolved and transformed, into themes, e.g. marital relationships of power, parent-child relationship, and the money complex. However, based on the narratives of the women and men in my ethnographic study, I found that each chapter flows much better conceptually if I place each of my interlocutors’ stories on its own. This is particularly because different elements in their stories complete each other, and so the entire narrative needs to be placed together with no gaps or breaks. Most women and men spoke about how gender and power are understood and practiced in their own marriages, in their children’s or parents’ marriages, and in their own relationships with their children and parents. Chapter two of this thesis presents the ethnographic work conducted in Zamalek, followed by chapter three which lays out ethnographic

work conducted in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima. Finally, chapter four is a reflection on the major themes that emerged in the narratives presented in chapters two and three, and a discussion about the modes of reproducing and contesting gender that arose in my interlocutors’ stories about their intimate family politics. It will closely reflect on the ways in which the category of class, with the various meanings and implications attached to it, relates to the production of gender ideologies within Egyptian families.

Chapter Two: Gender in Zamalek Families: production, power and resistance

Zamalek: The Setting

Prior to the 1900s, Zamalek was called “Al-Gezira,” meaning Island, which is self-explanatory given that it is surrounded by water from the river Nile (Raafat, 2000, p. 1). While the term Zamalek came from the name of a place in Giza in the South-west of “Embaba,” an area called “Al-Zamalek,” several explanations to the term have emerged (p. 1). Perhaps the most interesting and significant interpretation of the name is that it comes from the Arabic term “*dhu-mulk*,” meaning “a person who possesses something of value” (p. 1). For a few decades, Zamalek was mainly a garden, as noted in the urban plans of Gustave Delchevalerie, khedivial court landscaper (p. 1). During the British occupation of Egypt, the first army camp of the British was built on the island of Zamalek (p. 1). This camp was later turned into the Gezira Sporting Club, which was exclusive to the British (p. 1). The Gezira Sporting Club is still exclusive, but its British members have been replaced with Egypt’s rich and elite. According to the Gezira Sporting Club administration, the new membership fee has currently reached 600,000 Egyptian Pounds for a family, with an extra fee for children over twenty-one years of age. While it was possible to rent an apartment in Zamalek under the old rental law for as low as twenty Egyptian pounds a month, it now costs a few million pounds to buy an apartment on the Island. Despite the dramatically high prices of real-estate in Zamalek, most of the women and men I interviewed have owned or rented their homes for years, and some of them made it very clear to me that they could no longer afford to buy apartments in Zamalek. This also applies to the Gezira Sporting Club membership, which almost half of the people I spoke have. Most of them have been members at the club for over twenty years, and thus had only paid a fraction of the current membership fee when they first joined. The apartments of the women and men who took part in my project were all located in

buildings on the green streets of Zamalek. However, Zamalek's streets resembled much of Cairo's streets in the amount of garbage I frequently stumbled upon, the lack of proper sidewalks, and poorly maintained building exteriors. One of my respondents, Suzan, lives in a lavishly decorated apartment located on one of Zamalek's famous streets that hosts a chic Italian restaurant, a yoga studio, an art gallery, and a foreign embassy. Despite the unique location of her home, and its lavish interior, the building's exterior hasn't been maintained for years. Suzan told me that when her ten-year-old grandson, who lives in Italy with his parents, came to visit, wondered if she had become "poor." She told me that he asked his mother, "Why does grandma live here, mama? Is she poor now?" His mother laughed as she explained to him that grandma lives in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Cairo, and that it now costs several million Egyptian pounds to purchase an apartment in the area. Yet, as earlier mentioned, it is not possible to assign a particular predetermined class categorization to "all" residents of Zamalek. While most of the people I spoke with in the area could be said to belong to the "upper-middle class", it cannot be assumed that they represent all Zamalek inhabitants. Rather, the individuals in my ethnographic work represent a particular established community in Zamalek that drew my interest. Despite the variations in their stories and individual experiences, many of them (and their children) are Western-educated, socialize in the same sporting club, are involved in similar activities, and had similar perceptions of themselves as members of the "upper-middle class". Many of them proudly spoke about their "elitist" ancestry which they thought distinguished them from others. In the light of the above, this chapter presents the ethnographic work done with women and men in Zamalek. In exploring how gender ideologies are produced, reproduced and contested within Zamalek families, as well as how power operates within the family, most women and men spoke about how they understood and performed gender in their own marriages, in their children's or parents' marriages, and in their

own relationships with their children and parents, all of which will be presented in the following pages in the form of personal narratives.

The Story of Huda

Huda, a seventy-year-old widow with two sons in their forties, said that she was married off by her grandparents, whom she lived with, to an older man. She said, “My grandparents wanted to get rid of me as soon as possible and that’s why they married me off early. They married me and my sister off in the same year,” she added as she laughed. Her mother died when she was thirteen and her father remarried so she had to move in with her grandparents. In her words:

My husband died when I was very young. I’ve been a widow for twenty two years. My husband had a very strong character and, of course, had the upper hand and power. We live in a patriarchal society. I was a kind and stupid woman in my marriage. But I used to take care of many things in my family. My husband died when my kids were still in high school. Because the kids were young, I used to take all decisions when it comes to the kids. Even though I used to make those decisions, I do not see this as a form of power. I like the man to be a man. I like the man to make the decisions, to say yes and no. (Personal interview, January 2015).

While Huda mentioned that her husband had the “upper hand” and “power,” two elements are worth considering. First, Huda did not seem to have an issue with her perception that he had the upper hand. Rather, she mentioned that she is comfortable with her husband having what she perceives as “power.” Second, Huda’s definition of power is dependent on her own way of seeing power. That is, she did not see the elements which she had power over as signifiers of power, to an extent because she has a particular idea about “manhood” that she wished to maintain. Importantly, not only was Huda comfortable with the arrangement that she had with her husband, but she found it work in her favor. As she mentioned:

I dropped out when I got married because there is no way I could have studied while married. Also my husband told me, “There is no way I will let you work....it doesn’t matter if you finish school or not, you are staying home.” So I said to myself

why go through the hassle of studying, especially since I already hate studying. I was actually very happy he told me to drop out. Him saying that was an excuse to run away from studying. I was very comfortable and happy with this decision. I was a very good housewife, particularly because I studied at the Girl's College in Zamalek and they gave us home economics classes. With this education, we turned out good housewives. Also my mother and mother-in-law were very clever housewives, so I became a good housewife despite having three maids at home. I like taking care of the house....my house is always organized and clean, and you always find cooked meals in the fridge. I raised my kids myself despite having several servants. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

Drawing on Foucault, the relationship that Huda had with her husband is undeniably a relationship of power. Through this particular power relationship, her husband was able to exert a certain degree of influence on her actions by telling her that there is no way she will work outside the house. But Huda did not want to find a paid job. In fact, she preferred to stay in the house and manage the household, especially since her family was well-off, hired domestic labor, and her husband was able to provide her with a comfortable life. Of particular importance to Huda's case is that the "ideological value" attributed to housework is significantly less than that attributed to monetized work (Goldschmidt-Clermont, 1982), and there is no doubt that this normalization has had an impact on power relations in Huda's family. That is, because Huda's husband was the breadwinner for their family, he was able to decide as to whether she can seek paid work. Thus, the idea is not whether or not work "empowers" women, as argued from a modernist perspective, but rather that certain types of work are more valued than others. This holds true despite how reproduction processes are of an equal importance to capitalism as production processes. As a bank employee, Huda's husband needed to be fed, sheltered, and offered with other subsistence indispensables to be able to produce (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2010). The devaluation of housework has helped reproduce an unequal gendered power structure within the family, with women lesser in the hierarchy of power given that they are predominantly responsible for housework.

As mentioned earlier, Huda's mother passed away when she was thirteen years old. When her father remarried, she went to live with her grandparents who married her off six years later.

Huda recalled memories of her grandparents as she told me:

They are from the time of the "pasha." In the house, my grandfather had the upper hand. He was married to my grandma and one other woman at the same time. My grandfather's second wife lived in the same villa beneath my grandmother whom I lived with. The two wives got along very well and were friends; they loved each other. This was such a beautiful thing. Till this day, people tell me, "God, we still remember how close your grandmother and your grandfather's wife were." My grandmother didn't mind at all. He remarried when my grandmother got old and sick, so he found a younger wife...he was a womanizer. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

Huda, to a great extent, actively reproduced the relationship of power that her grandfather had with her grandmother in her own marriage. In many ways, she was comfortable with the arrangement that she had with him, and did not wish to change it. Not only that, but she found the arrangement to be beneficial to her. Thus, we cannot conclude that Huda reproduced the relationship that her grandparents had in a mechanical, static manner. She did evaluate her position and found it best to remain in a position that might appear as subordinate because it worked in her favor.

Furthermore, she was resistant to the changes in gender ideology that she continually witnessed through her children and grandchildren, and opposed many of their actions and behaviors. While she does not approve of some of her children's and grandchildren's actions, she told me that her role is not to change those actions, and that her children are free to raise their own children in whichever way they see fit. Both of her sons are married with teenage children, and they both live in separate homes. Regarding her grandchildren, she told me:

When my children were young, people didn't go out as much as they do now, so the kids were kind of locked up. Nowadays my grandkids are out all the time, most of the time they are at city stars or are hanging out in cafes around town. Back in the day, my kids had to be home by ten o'clock every night, but now my grandkids keep fighting with their parents to be home by eleven. I am an old- fashioned

woman; I like kids to be back by ten. If I were my nineteen-year-old granddaughter's mother, I would have made her life a living hell! I think all what is going on these days is wrong. If I had had a girl whose curfew is ten o'clock, I wouldn't allow her out the next day if she arrives five minutes late. Nowadays kids have a lot of freedom. My granddaughter has a car, drives everywhere, and I stay anxious and worried about her. I keep asking her "where did you go? What are you doing? And when are you coming back?" (Personal Interview, January 2015).

Huda told me that she thinks everything in her family needs to go back to the way it was in the 1950s. She was not only concerned about her granddaughter, but about her grandson as well. "When my grandson goes out, I would like to know where he goes, when he is coming back, and I would like to know his friends," she said. Despite Huda's desire to control the actions of her grandchildren, she does not interfere and leaves the matter to their parents. She explained that despite the good relationship she has with her sons, she does not play an active role in their families. "My sons love me. My son kisses my hand whenever he sees me. Do you ever see that happen now? They ask about me every day in the morning, afternoon, and evening. They are the kindest to me. But I do not interfere with their families whatsoever," she explained. Thus, she does not have a significant form of power over her children or grandchildren. Importantly, Huda's statement, "If I were my nineteen-year-old granddaughter's mother, I would have made her life a living hell!" reflects a desire to reproduce a particular gender ideology with the granddaughter. But this attempt is largely unsuccessful: Huda told me that in addition to her limited "disciplining" role in her granddaughters' life, her granddaughter herself is resistant to Huda's attempts. She laughed hysterically as she told me that whenever she comments about her granddaughter's actions, she tells her, "Oh my God, Grandma, [your beliefs] are as old as Hatshepsut's!" "I am very different because all my beliefs are from an old time, and I am hoping my ideas will become popular again," she explained. But Huda's concerns went beyond worrying about where her grandchildren spend their time. According to her:

I like girls to marry early. I would prefer to marry my granddaughter off now at the age of nineteen, just like I did. She refuses, of course, but I am sure she will eventually come back to her senses. Don't tell me she's young and crazy, she'll get used to marriage, she will become more mature, and will learn everything, including cooking. Just give it time. With the right training, she'll be able to do everything. But nowadays, it is very difficult to marry off girls. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

When I asked Huda why she would like to marry off her granddaughter at this young age, she responded:

I am an old-fashioned woman, I like old traditions. When she gets married early, she will get to see her kids, grandkids, and great-grand kids. When a girl marries at eighteen or nineteen, she can be easily controlled. At that age, she's like a piece of clay in her mother's hands, and in her husband's hands, so they will be able to shape her the way they wish. But when she is older, she would have went out, seen this and that, went to college and met different people, so it would be difficult to do so. When she gets a job, she will become opinionated and will argue with her husband, so the relationship won't work. Poor men, it is very hard to find suitable brides in this day and age. As a mother, it is easier to tell a younger daughter to be tolerant in her marriage, to learn to cook and so on. If you marry the girl at thirty-five, you can't even be sure that she will be able to have children. At thirty-five, she will have to run to the doctor for In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). (Personal Interview, January 2015).

Huda added that she prefers if her granddaughter doesn't work outside the house, and to be a housewife like herself. She said that she prefers if she stays home and takes care of the children. "Nowadays it is much harder to control kids, be it girls or boys. They are much more independent and opinionated," she complained. But Huda stressed on the importance of her granddaughter finding the right husband; "He needs to be classy and from the same social standard," she explained. According to Huda, the "classier" he is, the better he is expected to treat her, which sheds some light about how class politics dictate that individuals marry from the same "socio-economic class." Regardless, she made it clear that the sooner her granddaughter is married off, the better. "My friend has a daughter and whenever her mother tells her that she found a potential suitor, the girl responds, "Don't you ever bring this up again!"...I don't know why," she told me. Huda's viewpoint is interesting because it points to how modes of familial power could be

exercised. In Huda's case, she believes that through not exposing her granddaughter to the outside world, and through marrying her at a young age, she will more easily fit into a particular pre-defined gender category, and it will be easier to "control" her. The category of the subordinate heterosexual married woman, similar to that of the heterosexual married man, is seen by Huda as essential and natural, and the differences between genders are upheld by a system of gendered division of labor, as well as particular masculine and feminine identities and behaviors (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p. 28). Through an ideology that is seen to originate in human biology, the familial gender binary is underpinned by the notion that "men are men and women are women," resulting in the production of intense social, psychological and behavioral outcomes (p. 28). While some scholars have suggested that the making of gender is most significantly affected by familial influences, including cases in which family members voice out and convey their ideas to younger family members (Blume and Blume, 2003, p. 786), Huda was unsuccessful in this task given her limited power toward her granddaughter as well as her granddaughter's resistance to her belief system. Huda expresses her dissatisfaction with the way in which women's subjectivities have changed, "Women now are opinionated, when I was young things were very different, and we weren't like that. Women in my husband's family did not have much power. The man was the one who made all decisions and gave all orders," she elucidated in a nostalgic manner, and added that things have become worse as people moved away from "tradition."

As for her own sons, she told me that one of them was a tour guide, and was laid off four years ago after tourism was hit. "He's been staying at home since then. There have been no jobs since the revolution," she explained. She added that he has two boys and that they have financial problems now. "They have needs, they want to go out, and one of them wants to take guitar lessons. I feel bad for my son...poor thing," she said. His wife, she told me, went to the German school

and studied Tourism in college. She was a tour guide with her son, and now teaches German language at a school. “I am not against her work at all, especially since she needs to work after what happened to the tourism industry. After the revolution, she said there is no way I can stay at home,” Huda said. While Huda was completely opposed to women’s paid work, she finds her daughter-in-law’s job to be essential for her son’s family’s survival given that her son is currently unemployed, which emphasizes the way in which economic needs can sometimes alter gender ideologies and beliefs about gender roles, including the breadwinning role, which was seen by Huda as a man’s task.

The Story of Nazly

Nazly, a sixty-six-year-old widow with two children has been living in Zamalek for over twenty years. She told me that her husband, who was fourteen years her senior, “was like a foreigner....he used to dream in English!” Soon after he graduated from college, he travelled to Illinois for his PhD, and remained abroad for a while. Then he returned to Cairo, married her, and they both travelled with the United Nations where he held a “prestigious” position as a “permanent expert.” She went on to explain that his father was a mayor from the countryside, so she saw “a contradiction between his original background and the life that he lived later on.” She explained that even so, he insisted on marrying an Egyptian woman. “But I am the one who chose him. It was my mistake,” she told me and laughed. “How did you meet?” I asked. She responded, “He once gave us a lecture in college during one of his visits to Cairo, and he was like a foreigner. I asked my friends, “Do you know that he is my cousin?”” She went on to say that she knew he was a distant cousin, so she walked up to him and asked, “Professor, do you know that you are my cousin?” After a brief conversation, he asked her about how she will go home and she told him that she was taking a taxi. She explained, “I wasn’t really taking a taxi; I was going to walk home

because my house was close to school.” He then offered to drive her home. She told me that her friends commented, “He doesn’t suit you, he is too old for you,” which she disagreed on at the time. She eventually got married to him soon after graduation, lived with him for fourteen years, and travelled with him on multiple UN missions. However, she said her friends turned out right in the end, as she explained to me:

I loved to travel; when I was with him, I had a house in Geneva, and a house in Addis Ababa. But then I was tired of the UN environment, so I came back to Cairo. The environment wasn’t suitable for me. It was very “Western.” The people were loose and they didn’t work hard. I came from a house that was slightly religious. We prayed and fasted...but when I left with my husband, the praying and fasting was replaced with cocktails! The first thing my husband taught me was to fix drinks. My husband thought I should learn that so that people wouldn’t make fun of me! I became a pro; my husband hired a bartender from a big hotel to teach me how to make drinks. Back then, I knew nothing beyond Pepsi Cola! I had to learn these things as I had to hold receptions at least once a month. Those receptions were big because my husband was a big shot. At the beginning I was a kid and was happy with the responsibility, but then I found out that I was wrong. (Personal interview, January 2015).

She added that the big age difference was a problem as well. According to Nazly:

He was fourteen years older. People used to ask him, “Is she your daughter or your wife?” especially since I had a very tiny figure. And those people who worked with him for the UN were all older. He focused on his work; he loved work, research and studying, which he was great at. But that was all that he worried about. (Personal interview, January, 2015).

But Nazly’s husband’s work environment and the significant age difference were not the only reasons for why she thought her marriage was a disappointment, she further told me:

He didn’t talk much, and he was happy that I talk instead of him, and take charge instead of him. It didn’t really matter to him. He gave me directions, but I did what I wanted in the end. For example, while he was travelling, I had a *passé*, so I would travel. He would ask me, “In which country are you?” He trusted me too much, more than he should have. The man should make his wife feel that he is in control, and that he knows what she is doing and where she is at. It is not right to leave everything in her hands. This used to bother me. I didn’t like being both the woman and the man. People used to tell my husband, “Take care! She is very young,” but he would say, “No, if I placed her in hell, she’ll be fine!” Since my husband didn’t

keep me from doing anything, I did what I wanted. I did nothing wrong...not for him, but for me. (Personal interview, January 2015).

Nazly's case is particularly interesting because it showcases how she was dissatisfied with the power relationship she had with her husband, despite the degree of power she had. She didn't assume the gender-specific roles that Huda mentioned, and her husband did not expect her to. Her dissatisfaction with this arrangement provides insight into how some women might wish to enforce gender-specific practices and conceptions within their families and in their marriages, even if the men do not attempt to do so. She did mention to me that this experience of being "in control" benefited her because she later had to "play the role of the woman and the man" as she raised her kids by herself after her husband passed away. When her husband died, her son was twelve, and her daughter was eight. When I asked Nazly to tell me more about how she felt in her marriage, and what she desired, she said "I like that a woman is able to feel and to be in touch with her femininity, and to feel that her husband is protective of her, and is in control, even if he trusts her." She then gave me an example of what she did not like in her marriage:

In one of the receptions we had in our house, my husband's boss asked me to dance, and he "poked" me when he kissed my hand. I told my husband what he did, and he said, "so what? I am sick of you thinking that you are the most attractive woman in the room." I really was beautiful back then, but if he wants to give this reaction, then well...as he wishes! After that, I grew my nails and I started to scratch! I wish those things bothered him. (Personal interview, January 2015).

She added that she wished her husband was like her father, "to have the final word." She said she did not like to be constantly placed in a decision-making role. "With my husband, it didn't matter if he agreed or disagreed, and things went my way, which I didn't like. I like the strong man who is able to decide for his wife and who makes her comfortable," she said. She nostalgically remembers her father, who was a prominent lawyer, and said that he was the most "powerful" in the family. She added that her mother assumed the role of raising the children. "Because this was

not the case in my marriage, I later figured out that this is not that life that I want. I tried to change the relationship I had in the marriage....I tried to change his role, but I couldn't," she mentioned. Yet, she once again told me that she liked "the game" in the early years of her marriage. "I was very young, and was very happy that I was able to control the man who controlled a big office. As long as he didn't say no to me, then I was happy," Nazly reaffirmed.

Nazly's narrative showcases how her marriage was a site through which she attempted to reproduce particular conceptions about gender, masculinity and femininity. As Goffman (1976) argues, masculinity and femininity are seen as "prototypes of essential expression-something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterization of the individual" (p. 75). Through the performance of certain acts, individuals are able to deliver those expressions (p. 75). Importantly, according to Butler (1988), if gender is manifested by means of continuous acts, then the conception of an essential femininity and masculinity, which she describes as "an essential sex," is constructed in a way that masks the performative characteristic of gender (p. 528). Masculinity (and femininity) is essentially a social construction that has resulted in the construction of beliefs of hierarchy and power (Jackson and Balaji, 2011, p. 22). If we are to analyze the historical meaning of masculinity, we will find that the "masculine identity" was synonymous with physical ability, intellect, and heterosexivity, and an "ideal" model of a man and a woman has been constructed (Jackson and Balaji, 2011, p. 22). By means of those arbitrated constructions, a woman had to ideally be "feminine," and a man had to ideally be "masculine" (Jackson and Balaji, 2011, p. 22). This social construction of feminine and masculine has emphasized the desire for a continuous reassertion of this "psychological" division (Kandiyoti, 1987, p. 387). Kandiyoti adds that as the legend of the male supremacy becomes more captivating, it becomes harder for a man to achieve it (p. 387). She further argues

that masculinity is a position that is not permanently present but that is attained, and can be lost at any moment (p. 387). Therefore, as she contends, men are continuously concerned with the act of verifying their masculinity and are constantly worried about the possibility of its loss (p. 387). But the case of Nazly is quite different. According to her narrative, her husband was not in any way preoccupied with verifying his “masculinity,” if we are to view masculinity in the way defined above by Nazly. Instead, she longed for a particular performance of masculine identity that she thought her husband lacked. Thus, to further Kandiyoti’s (1987) argument, while it is true that the social construction of femininity and masculinity has underscored the need for a continuous reassertion of this binary, it cannot be assumed that it is solely the men who attempt to reinforce the masculine identity. In some cases, including the cases of Nazly and Huda, women try to reinforce the masculine/feminine binary on themselves and on others as well.

Nazly told me that because she was not happy with the arrangement that she had with her husband, she decided to come back to Egypt with her two children, a boy and a girl. She further told me that when she was pregnant with her daughter, she tried to abort her. “I already had a son back then and I thought there is no way I am having another kid,” she explained. She added that her uncle, who is a prominent gynecologist, told her that he does not perform abortion procedures, so she kept the baby. She explained that her “unusual” relationship with her husband made her afraid of having more children. A few years after she came back to Egypt, her husband joined her but passed away soon after. Nazly was thirty one-years old at the time. “I decided since I made the mistake of having children, which was my fault, that I would raise them, so I never remarried,” Nazly recalled. She added that she couldn’t give her kids away to someone to raise them for her and that she had to raise them herself. Unlike the narratives of many of my other interlocutors, Nazly openly expressed how she did not see herself to fit in the category of the mother and the

caregiver, and that she performed those roles out of obligation. This slightly contradicted with the way she expressed her desire to have a family like the one her parents had, where familial gender roles are strictly defined, and where the wife is primarily responsible for the children. When I tried to take the conversation further so I would understand, Nazly mentioned that while children were not part of her master plan, she wished to have a marital relationship with an explicit masculine/feminine division. Importantly, she told me that a large extent of the caregiving responsibility was assigned to caregivers, particularly before she returned to Egypt. According to Nazly:

Each one of my kids had a nanny. When we were in Ethiopia in the early 1970s, the kids were mostly the responsibility of the nannies. My daughter was attached to her nanny, a very beautiful Ethiopian woman whom I took everywhere with us. I hurt her when we left because Haile Selassie didn't agree to "give" her to me, so I had to leave her there. She kept on weeping to Haile Selassie to allow her to come with us, but he didn't let her. He refused and told me, "You will make her your slave." I tried convincing him but he didn't agree. I knew him because he was raised in a "*balady*" (popular) area in Egypt. He was raised in Soliman Gohar street in Cairo. (Personal interview, January 2015).

While the issue of delegating reproductive work to domestic workers and the way in which this matter intersects with race and class is beyond the scope of my research, it is worth noting that labor performing reproductive work continues to be a "commodity" that is bought by women of race and class privilege. (Parrenas, 2000, p. 561). This has upheld a particular division of reproductive labor that is closely tied to race, resulting in the creation of a hierarchal structure amongst women (Nakano Glenn, 1992). Furthermore, as reproductive labor is commodified, the ideological value assigned to reproductive work diminishes. To quote Rothman (1989, 43), "When performed by mothers, we call this mothering... when performed by hired hands, we call it unskilled." In addition to the consequences that the commodification of affect might have on the

family, the delegation of housework and caregiving tasks to another woman fails to challenge the gender division of labor model.

Nazly also made it clear to me that money was never an issue for her. In addition to her husband's inheritance, she got a paid job for the first time after her husband passed away. "My husband's friends were important figures in Egypt, and they helped me get a job. A big shot very easily got me a good job in the government. I worked there until I retired," she told me. This aspect is worth keeping in mind as I introduce other women and men with a substantially different economic situation. For example, a comparison of the case of Nazly to that of Farida (to be introduced shortly) makes it clear that income and survival are closely tied to the workings of power.

Nazly lived alone and raised her children till gradation; she told me she took very good care of the children while making sure she did the things she liked, like playing bridge and travelling. She said she did "anything that [she] can think of." As for how she saw her husband's contribution to her children's upbringing, she said:

I would have preferred if my husband had left his fingerprints on our kids more than he did. His love to them was excessive. He never opposed any of their desires. He left them to do whatever they wanted to do. And they loved him very much. He took good care of them although from a distance. My son turned out exactly the opposite of his father, just like me. And the girl turned out like her father. Even though she didn't live with him for a long time, but she was always...you know young girls are usually attached to their fathers. She loved him a lot, and he was too tolerant towards her, so she turned out a lot like him. She turned as low as her father [she said jokingly]. They saw their dad as perfect and ideal. It was God's will that their dad was very kind to them as he wasn't going to live for long. (Personal interview, January 2015).

She also told me that she accepted her kids' characters and never tried to change them, "I didn't try to imprint my character on my kids. I let them be." She added that she worked on

strengthening their relationship with each other, and raised them to be tolerant towards one another, and to respect one another despite their disagreements.

Her son now works as an electronic engineer, and the girl holds a managerial position at a major gas company. Nazly's children are both married. Her son has a daughter, and her daughter chose to not have children. "My daughter works a lot and doesn't have time for kids," she told me. She explained that her daughter's life is about work and taking part in charity projects, and that she comes home every day at nine in the evening. Nazly mentioned that her daughter does not like children like her mother, but that does not mean that Nazly approves of her daughter's decision to not have children. "My daughter decided not to have kids. It is not a good decision, but she told me if I have a baby, you will raise him or her. So I said no, I raised you and I won't raise any more kids," Nazly said. She then hesitated before she told me that if she had gotten back in time, she would not have kids, "I do not like kids," she said.

To go back to Nazly's daughter, her refusal to have children was not the only thing that Nazly did not approve of:

My daughter married twice, and she is in total control of her husband. She can tell him "the suitcase is next to the door," meaning, she can kick him out at any time. Her husband has a son who lives with his mother. She makes all decisions and then lets him know. What she wants goes regardless of whether he agrees. I don't think that's right, but she doesn't listen to me. (Personal interview, January 2015).

Unlike the narratives of many of my respondents, Nazly's daughter has the greater power in her family. Nazly's ability to influence her daughter's ideas and actions, however, is very limited (if present). But this is not the case with Nazly's son, who does listen to her. "My son listens to me more, but I have to be secretive when I want to tell him anything. I tell him everything in private," she told me. When I asked what she means by "secretive," she said she meant behind his wife's back. While in this case Nazly has a degree of power over her son and his family, the husband is

expected to show to his wife that he is not influenced by his mother's views, which is not seen as favorable. For some women, this reflects insufficient "manliness" on the side of the husband. Thus, his mother's influences have to remain concealed so as to uphold a particular image of his "masculine" identity.

The Story of Mohamed

Kandiyoti's argument presented above regarding the way in which some men could be deeply concerned with confirming their masculine identities was reflected in Mohamed's narrative, a fifty-six-year old man, married with two sons and a daughter, who worked in finance all his life, and who recently retired. In the case of the majority of the men I spoke with, I sensed a desire to affirm certain beliefs about gender, and about their valued "masculine" identities. Mohamed told me that life was much easier when he was in his twenties and thirties. "In the 1980s, my wife and I worked in Sharjah for a few years, and there were so many opportunities as our salaries were good compared to the price of living," he recalled. He told me they had no pressures, and he and his wife both had paid jobs. He worked in finance and she worked as a secretary for several general managers of multinational corporations. When asked about how gender works in his family, Mohamed assertively said:

The man is the head of the household and he is the one who makes the decisions. With my wife it really depends on the situation, but if there is a decision that has to be taken and there is disagreement, after discussing it, it is my decision in the end. And she accepts this most of the time. A man takes decisions, a man is responsible for the house, even when a woman works and brings in money... we are a traditional eastern society and for our generation, not necessarily yours, if the man is providing enough for his house and does not need his wife, at least financially, then he is the head of the household. The wife's responsibility is the house, and upbringing of the children, a woman's work is for herself. The money she brought in was a bonus and we saved it all. We never needed the money from her work. In my kids' generation, women and men are not brought up in very different ways, but in our days the mother was taught to be a housewife, cooking cleaning and managing the house, I was taught to be a provider, everyone knows their path, even

though my wife is educated, she left work to take care of the children when we had them. The man's priority is providing, and the women's priority is the house and children. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

There is a clear gender division of labor in Mohamed's household; housework and caregiving responsibilities are assigned to the wife, and the financial responsibility is assigned to the husband. But what is perhaps more insightful in Mohamed's narrative is the way in which he ties his "manhood" to the breadwinning responsibility. Without me asking or even hinting, he made it clear that he never needed his wife's money, and that supporting the house was his sole responsibility. He also viewed himself, without hesitation as the more powerful, and he attributed his powerfulness to his decision making capacity, to money and to what his religion dictates. Mohamed's narrative resonates with Lorber's (1994) argument that draws on Foucault and Gramsci and states that gendered systems of power are being made acceptable through cultural constructions as well as the use of religion, but are most strongly reproduced through rendering the process invisible, and making the possibility of change inconceivable (p. 58). Mohamed described his role as a breadwinner as a "path" that is dictated by "tradition" and religion, and that anything outside of this role is unthinkable to him. He also expressed the same regarding his wife's caregiving role. However, his contention that his children's generation holds a different array of gender ideology that he provides insight about the fluidity and ever-changing nature of gender.

Despite Mohamed's rigid view about gender and power in the family, he said that he notices a significant difference between how power operated in his parents' and grandparents' households and in his own household. Regarding his grandparents' household, he said:

The level of conversation and consultation in my household is different from the time of my father and grandfather. My grandmother told me she called my grandfather "the Commander and Prohibitor." There was no discussion on any matter, decisions were not made together, when he said this has to be done, it is done, this cannot be done, it is not done. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

Moreover, he said his mother was a housewife, and his father was the provider for the family. He emphasized that the one who brought in the money had the upper-hand. That being said, Mohamed told me that his mother and father divorced later on, and his mother remarried. He did not want to give more details about the divorce, but he pointed to that his father was very “dominant” and his mother was not happy with it. This is important as it provides insight about how women from older generations (his mother is around eighty years old) actively resisted, which challenges the dominant belief- that many of my respondents expressed- that older women stayed in their marriages no matter what.

But the centrality of money to Mohamed’s story cannot be overlooked. In narrating his story, he was fixated on the idea that the amount of money a person brings to the house will affect his/her level of power, which he primarily defined as the ability to make decisions. Mohamed has two sons and a daughter, and the older son is married to a sociologist. He told me that he does not understand the relationship that his son has in his marriage; he and his wife have agreed on dividing all the financial and household responsibilities equally, and they both have an equal decision making capacity in the house. According to Mohamed:

My children’s generation looks at manhood in a different way than us, I don’t understand what this is and it is very alien to me...the problem with this generation is that it was opened to the world too fast, took too much from the west and moved away from religion which has shifted the balance in relationships. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

Despite Mohamed’s resistance to the changing and evolving definitions of gender, his narrative reveals that the power that parents have over the children’s gender beliefs is very limited. He and his wife were completely opposed to how power works in their son’s marriage, and they tried to tell their son that they think he is wrong. But the son’s strong resistance to their views, and his belief that their views are “obsolete,” made them try to live with his views, as Mohamed told me.

When I asked about his daughter, once again, Mohamed brought up the money issue. “I hope that my daughter marries a man that does not need her money. But I also want her to be independent and not need his money,” he told me. Mohamed emphasized that his daughter has a master’s degree from the US, and that this will make power work differently in her marriage. Regarding the money issue, his view was paradoxical. He wants her husband to be the sole provider, but at the same time, he wants her to be able to make her own money in case something goes wrong. “She should keep her money to herself,” he told me. Mohamed’s story about his daughter points to that the inequalities that gender produces extends to men as well, who are in some cases, expected to fully provide for the household even if the wife has a paid job. It is also clear that while some parents are opposed to the power a daughter-in-law can have, they think differently when it is the daughter who holds such power. For example, he told me that his daughter-in-law has to work because nowadays the income of the family does not just depend on the man. On the other hand, he expressed that he wishes that his daughter keeps “her money to herself,” as earlier mentioned. In any case, it is worth recognizing how household relationships and divisions of labor, though highly intricate and fluid, partly emerge from material disparities among family members, and from the workings of socially-constructed gendered beliefs (Lawson, 1998). I am not attempting to endorse the so-called “resource theory” that was popular among works on power around forty years ago, which “justifies power dynamics as resulting from the amount of relative resources each partner brings to the relationship” (Pyke, 1996, p. 528). Rather, my aim is to highlight how some men and women view money as the most important determinant of power despite how a series of complex factors that transcend material resources feed into the construction of gender power relations.

The Story of Sameh

The issue of money was brought up by another man, Sameh, a forty-three-year-old married man with two children, albeit in a slightly different way than Mohamed. Sameh explained that when he got married, his parents and in-laws did not help out financially. “My wife and I paid for everything. We both worked from day one to be able to reach the living standard that we wanted. It took us twenty years of working together to reach what we’ve reached,” he explained. Sameh added that the money his wife contributes to the household has elevated her decision-making capacity. But he stressed that he remains the more “powerful” in the family, and that his decision-making capacity is greater than his wife’s. Similar to Mohamed, he defines power in terms of the ability to provide for the house, and the ability to participate in the decision making process. According to Sameh:

Times have changed. There is now greater equality for women and consequently women have a share in decision making, especially given that women have become much more educated. Because my wife works and helps pay for the house expenses, she has a role in the decision making process, although smaller than my role. We communicate and discuss things together. When my wife and I need to make a decision, we consult each other. If I like her decision, I go with it. If I don’t, my decision goes, regardless of which of the decisions is right. Sometimes my wife’s decision is better than mine, so I take it, irrespective of the consequences. When we want to make a decision to buy a house, if we weren’t able to reach a decision together, I go with my decision. I like to listen to my wife because my decision might not always be right. But the husband usually makes the final decision because usually he is older than the wife, so has a greater life experience. And the man’s experience in life is generally greater than a woman because he has greater exposure under normal circumstances. But I am not trying to look down on women, because some women are smart and think well. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

Similar to Mohamed, Sameh associated being a man with having the final word, and with having more decision-making power, and he justified his view by means of explaining that he “naturally” has more experience than his wife because he is a man. Sameh’s narrative points to that the discourse of gender has evolved over the years, but it also reflects a modernist perspective that views paid work and money as a means to “empower” women and increase their decision-making

capacity. This also points to how housework is valued less than paid work, which is consistent with Huda's and Mohamed's narratives. On the same note, Sameh told me:

Women who work are more exposed than those who don't, because working women have greater exposure on a daily basis. My wife meets people every day and interacts with them. She experiences conflicts at work and deals with those conflicts. However, women who stay at home become separated from society in many different ways. This makes it much harder for them to make decisions, and when they do, they might not be right. Women who stay at home are not exposed, quite frankly. This is why some of my friends' wives who stay at home might not be fit to make decisions. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

Sameh further told me that although his wife works outside the house, "tradition" necessitates that men work and women stay home as long as the man is able to cover the house expenses. He says that because he cannot cover the house expenses on his own, his wife helps him out. But he also made it clear that she has the right to say that she will not help out, but that will mean that they won't be able to continue to live in the same standard as they do now. They will have to live in a lesser standard that is tied to his income, he explained. He further told me that his acceptance of this particular thing has increased now given the time we live in. "We want to live a comfortable life. If I could have my wife stay home, I would, but then we won't afford the standard of living we have now," he said. There appears to be a slight contradiction between what Sameh perceives as the ideal situation, that in which he provides for the house and his wife stays home, and his actual situation. Sameh does not wish to give up the comfortable lifestyle he has with his wife and two children: a big house, three cars, and international schools for the children. He also feels that his wife's career is making her more "fit" to make decisions than other women who don't work outside the house. At the same time, there was a tone of unease in his voice. My speculation is that he felt that his "manhood" is tied to being the sole provider for the house. This was particularly clear when he told me:

What happens inside the house is confidential. If house secrets became known to people, the husband might not be happy. As long as people think that the man provides for the house, then fine. Even if we agree that the woman provides for the house, it must be known to people that the man does. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

Sameh pointed to that maintaining an image of a particular gendered familial system is of significant importance. In other words, he feels it is important to act out a performance of compliance to dominant gender ideology. While he was happy that his wife has a paid job that helps with the house expenses, he did not want his family and friends to know that she helps out, in order to maintain an image of his “masculine” identity that, to him, is tied to being the sole breadwinner. But Sameh made sure he was not generalizing; he told me that every house is different and that in some houses, the woman’s character is stronger than the man’s. In this case, she has the final say, he told me. “This is the case with one of our friends. She respects his opinion but has a stronger character. He makes more money but she has a bigger influence on him. It is fine as long as they are happy,” he said. Thus, to Sameh, the way others do gender is subjective, and for other families, money might not necessarily be the sole indicator of power, which he mainly defines by the decision-making capacity.

He further explained that he and his wife have different responsibilities that are tied to gender:

In marriage, men have the muscular responsibilities and women have the non-muscular responsibilities. My wife cooks and shops, but I can help her shop. I am responsible for running errands and driving my kids so my wife doesn’t have to do it. In our culture, there are things that the woman cannot do, like getting paperwork done at the government offices. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

To draw on Zvonkovic et al. (1996), Sameh’s (and Mohamed’s) narrative reveals that marital processes and responsibilities are gendered. Yet while Sameh’s narrative points to that a stiff gendered system exists in his family, he mentioned that his wife would not accept to be told to do

certain things, including staying home and not seeking paid work, which reveals that women exercise forms of resistance in their marriages, and renegotiate matters with their husbands. This is not to imply that paid work is an indispensable mode of resistance, but it is a good example of how some women resist the gendered power structure that exists in the family. Sameh, however, did not want to talk more about his wife's position, and appeared to want to maintain a particular image of how gender is performed in his house.

Moreover, Sameh spoke about how he compares the relationship he has with his wife with that of his parents and grandparents:

A lot of things have changed. In my grandparents' generation, less women were educated in comparison to men. My grandfather for instance was a dictator in the house, so he had it organized in a very strict way. This is mainly because there was no education like now. Back then, women were expected to stay home and wait for a husband right after finishing secondary school. People used to think negatively of women who went to college. Some houses are still like that, but many have changed. There were greater limitations for women compared to men. Today women work, my wife works, so she helps provide for the house, and so she has a say. She has a smaller say than me, but she still has a say. We communicate and discuss things together (Personal Interview, October 2014).

Sameh's above contention regarding how his grandparents' household functioned and how this compares to his household, although strictly tied to education and paid work, points to the possibility of transformation of gendered systems of power in the family. But he continues to maintain that the transformation in marital relationships does not mean that his wife now has an equal share of power. My speculation is that this is partly an attempt to maintain a particular idea of his "masculine" identity, as mentioned earlier. Sameh's narrative regarding his parents was very similar:

There is a forty-year age difference between me and my parents, and so my wife and I are much more open-minded than them. With my parents, my dad used to make the sole decision when it came to finances and other major decisions, but now it is different with my wife...My wife is more liberated than my mom was. There

is more communication and discussion in our relationship. And that is a very significant change. Many women, including my wife, are well-educated. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

Putting aside how Sameh's understanding of gender is heavily influenced by modernist notions of women's liberation and empowerment, the same interpretation of his grandparents' marital arrangement can be applied to his narrative about his parents. On the same note, he mentioned that his parents weren't against his wife getting a paid job as they saw "the bigger picture." "This is better than if I had gone to them and asked for money to get married. I am against that and wife is against it too. We both decided to work and support ourselves. Neither of us used our family's money," he said. It is common among many families in Cairo, including most of my interviewees' families, that the parents financially support their children's marriages. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that they will have a form of direct power in the children's marriages as a result. However, in the case of Sameh, the possibility of his parents having a degree of power over his marriage has, according to him, significantly diminished because they did not support his marriage.

As earlier mentioned, Sameh has a son and a daughter. They are both teenagers, and Sameh predicts that their marriages will be like his, with both spouses contributing financially, "unless my son can make enough money to support his wife, or if Sara, my daughter, gets a rich husband who can support her," he said. He added that if his daughter makes more money than her husband, it must not be known. This is similar to his narrative about his own marriage, in which he clarified the importance of maintaining a particular image of the man being the breadwinner. He added that the cooking, cleaning, and laundry is the role of the woman, and that he would expect his daughter to cook when she is married, as her husband should be responsible for other things. Sameh explained:

The degree to which Sara will be responsible for supporting her family will depend on her husband. If the husband has enough income to make his wife comfortable,

then great. I don't mind that she stays in the house if she and her husband agree on that and they think it is better for them. I cannot tell them what to do, because this is an Eastern society and Islam make men responsible for providing for women. In this case, the woman needs to keep the house clean, prepare meals, raise the kids, and maintain the reputation and position of the family and her husband. These are basics for the marriage to continue. He can't be working while she fools around all day on the streets. There has to be respect for the house. Even if you have maids and drivers, the woman should be responsible for the house. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

The way in which Sameh wishes to maintain the gender order resonates with how gender as a stratification system organizes acceptable female bodies and confines reproductive tasks to women (Amigot and Pujal, 2009, p. 650). This interpretation of gender as a system of power is influenced by Foucault's conception that power functions as a mechanism of production and regulation of life (biopower), and targets individual bodies (Foucault, 1976 and Amigot and Pujal, 2009). Furthermore, and similar to Mohamed's and Salma's narratives (whom I will introduce shortly), a particular gendered arrangement is made acceptable through the use of religion (Lorber, 1994, p. 58). Also, Sameh's contention that women "maintain the reputation and position of the family and [the] husband" reflects an understanding of the woman as a gatekeeper of "honor," "stability," and the institution of the family. According to Baron (2005), in Egypt, women's morals have been viewed as indicators of family honor. It is also worth noting that Sameh's narrative reflects how particular parental modes of control over female bodies are handed over to the husbands after marriage, and the parents' control diminishes.

Sameh, moreover, told me that there is a slight difference in the way he and his wife raised Sara and Sherif, their son. In addition to teaching Sara how to cook, something which Sherif is not taught, further restrictions are placed on Sara's actions. According to Sameh:

Because Sara is a girl, we need to pay more attention to her. We take care of her more than Sherif. I don't like Sara to stay out late, but her brother can. This is for security and reputation reasons. Girls can be raped, kidnapped, killed, and injured.

The boy can also go to places that are not very secure, but my daughter can't.
(Personal Interview, October 2014).

It is worth realizing how girls are often seen by their parents as in need of male protection. This is very closely tied to the way in which women are sexualized. As Badran (2005) states, the construction of gender in Egypt can be attributed to the persistence of the idea of sexual difference between men and women, and that women are sexual creatures. Consequently, a girl's virginity (and safety) becomes a concern of men since they are demanded to safeguard, oversee, and preserve their women's virginity (Abu-Odeh, 2010). Arab men perform daily acts which partly serve to guarantee that girls in their families are virgin (Abu-Odeh, 2010). Sameh assigns this task to his son, Sherif, who is supposed to make sure his sister remains safe. According to Sameh, "My daughter has to listen to her brother in issues related to her safety. He is older and is more out there, and knows what the streets are like. He is responsible for taking care of her." But despite his son's task of "protecting" his sister, Sameh said that his wife exercises the greatest amount of control over the daughter, preventing her from "doing certain things because she protects the house and [their] daughter." This sheds some light on his wife's role in safeguarding the family's "honor" through monitoring her daughter's actions and "morals." Sameh highlighted the importance of this task as "girls can bring a bad reputation to their families nowadays." He said that back in the day, a girl's morals were indicative of her family's, but nowadays, many girls have become "loose," and thus he emphasized the significance of keeping Sara from "acquiring loose morals."

The Story of Salma

Salma is a twenty-nine-year-old married woman with two children. She was born in Kuwait, where her parents used to work, and her family moved back to the building that they own in Zamalek when she was five years old. Salma's account links gender to particular roles and

responsibilities that she believes every person should assume based on their gender, which provides further insight into how the gendering of familial and marital responsibilities acts as a site through which gender is produced within families (Cunningham, 2005, p. 1038). According to Salma:

Ideally, and of course that very rarely happens, the man should provide...and here I am sounding sexist...he should be making more money. To explain, this is dictated by my religion, I am a Muslim so according to *shari'a* law men are supposed to provide for their wives, for everything. The man should also provide for the house, buy the food, pay the rent, and for everything. It is the woman's responsibility to take care of the house chores, the cooking, the cleaning, the laundry, and all that, but what happens in this day and age is very different. Both men and women get into marriage knowing these things, this is how they are raised and this is what society dictates. This is how they see the world and there is always this interplay between tradition and what happens today...you know what I mean...so there is always a struggle between how things were done in the past and the way things are done today. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

Salma's account of what she perceives as ideal resonates with the accounts of Mohamed and Sameh. But the reality of the financial aspect of Salma's marriage was slightly different than what she thought of as the best scenario:

What happens in my household is that we both...it's a dual income family, I make money, he makes money, I make a little bit more money than he does and that bothers me, I wish he made more money. So in a sense, it is not a traditional marriage. And quite frankly, I think that can be very dangerous. But that does not mean that I do not take care of the house; I feel responsible for keeping the house tidy, and well...I won't leave the laundry to pile up, I just have to do it. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

Salma's account is interesting in many ways. I met Salma for a few times before she was able to speak openly to me about her marriage. When she did open up, she mentioned the money issue, which she told me was a reason for occasional tension in her household. Salma does independent freelance work which pays well, but her mother helps financially support her, her husband, and her son and daughter. The lavish apartment where she lives is also owned by her mother. If we were to look at Salma's story through Sameh's perspective, we could presume that

money has added to Salma's "power" and decision-making capacity. But Salma's case is much more complex than the simple modernist equation which assumes that work/material resources produce power. First, she appeared unsatisfied with the fact that she makes more money than her husband. In her point of view, money adds to a man's power, and contributes to the making of his "masculine" identity, and accordingly a man should be making more money than his wife as a confirmation of his masculine identity, and his greater "power." The fact that she was making more money than her husband made her uneasy. To draw on Jackson and Balaji (2011), the social construction of an ideal masculinity and femininity has led to the making of particular ideas about power in Salma's household. Consequently, an endless obligation to reaffirm of this ideal (Kandiyoti, 1987) is present in Salma's household. At the same time, she told me that she uses her financial privilege as a bargaining mechanism when conflict arises with her husband, which she made clear that she was not happy about as it "hurts [her] husband's feelings," as she said.

Salma, unlike Mohamed's and Nazly's children who are close to her in age, thinks her beliefs were very heavily influenced by her mother. She still lives with her in the same building and considers her as her best friend, as she told me. According to Salma, "I think my beliefs are a combination of so many different things. The most significant factor that affects my beliefs would be my immediate family." She told me that her mother- and her father- has always been a dominant character, "she's very successful, and she was a bestselling writer. She's actually quite famous, she would walk down the street and people would call her name." Salma's father was a financial consultant working for the Kuwaiti government before moving back to Cairo when Salma was only five. "Because I only lived there till I was five, I wasn't really influenced by Kuwaiti society," she said. Salma further explained that her family played a huge role in the way she views gender. She told me:

My father has always been very supportive of my mother. He never really felt intimidated or it never really bothered him her success. He was actually very proud of her. He cheered her on, he always helped her out, he always provided major guidance and support for her because he never felt his identity or his gender in a sense were being threatened. If it wasn't for him, she wouldn't have been this successful. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

Despite Salma's implication that the way she understands and *does* gender is heavily influenced by her parents' beliefs, she told me that as she got older, she began to question those ideas and beliefs, and as she got even older as an adult, she created her own belief system. She then added:

...but having said that I will always compare my worldview with my parents'. I can be like oh I know I do not want to wear the veil but I know my mother wears the veil and I respect her for doing that but I don't want to do it right now. My mother is veiled, I choose not to wear it but it doesn't mean I disagree with her either. I am still always going to see the world through her eyes and then decide to do what works for me and it is always a matter of my relationship with my parents. I have an extremely good relationship with my mother. We are very close. She is my best friend. I guess our relationship is not the typical one. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

She added that her brother "is extremely independent," he moved out in his mid-twenties and later moved to Amsterdam for ten years and "that is also a function of gender because he is a boy he can move out, he can live on his own, he can move to a different country but a girl doesn't have that same luxury," she explained. In many families girls and boys are treated differently, mostly due to the factor of "fear," and the belief that girls need to be protected, which is closely tied to sexuality and honor, as well as dominant narratives about acts of rape and violence committed against girls. But even girls who choose to comply with their parents' discourses of gender, like Salma, cannot be considered to be doing so blindly and without questioning, and do not comply with every single aspect of those discourses. Salma's narrative reveals that she is in fact convinced with her parents' ways and that is precisely why she actively chose to reproduce them.

As earlier mentioned, Salma has two children, a boy and a girl, who are both toddlers.

When I asked her to speak about how she intends to raise them, she told me:

I know I have a major contradiction, given that I said that I don't see a difference between a boy and a girl early on. The way I want to raise my son is very different than the way I want to raise my daughter. For me what I want to do with Hassan is that I want to provide him with guidance, show him right from wrong, which is always very subjective but you know, give him my ideas of right and wrong, and then I want to give him a lot of freedom to do what he wants, to experience different things, to travel abroad, to study abroad, to do all these things and I don't want to dictate things to him. For the girl, obviously that would not be the case. She would probably be spending a lot more time with me, I would have to sort of be more protective of her, because that's again a very Egyptian thing. We feel like we need to be protective of girls, like this glass container that can break any minute. But with boys, they are like a rubber container that can bounce back up. We tend to treat boys like they are unbreakable, we treat girls like they are very delicate. But let us not forget that boys have their own set of problems and challenges like drug addiction and so on and so forth. The way I want to raise Hassan is according to mutual respect and freedom. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

Salma is aware of the paradox between her theoretical understanding of gender, and how she performs it in the every day. I found her expression, girls are like a “glass container that can break any minute. But with boys, they are like a rubber container that can bounce back up,” particularly interesting. It somehow summed up Sameh's view as well. Salma's view that girls are like an object that can easily break, unlike boys, is closely tied to how gender ideology is related to sexuality, as I earlier mentioned. Her view is a reproduction of her parents' gender ideology. It is also interesting to see how girls' “problems” are seen to be very different from boys'. While a girl's hymen and “reputation” are perhaps the primary elements that parents feel they need to guard, a boy's virginity is not given the same importance. Drug addiction, on the other hand, is seen by Salma, and other respondents, as the primary threat to boys. But some parents' concern may be misplaced given that El-Kharrat, executive director of the private drug rehabilitation organization Freedom Program, believes the male-to-female drug abuse ratio has reached 3:1, if not narrower (Keddie, 2015, p. 1).

Salma further explained how she formed her beliefs regarding the gendered treatment of children:

As a girl, I never really travelled on my own, most of my travels were with my older sister and when I was studying in Dallas my mother was there with me. And I remember I said that to an Indian friend of mine in the US who was very influenced by American culture and he was like, “Oh, it’s very interesting that your mom is with you, you are very sheltered.” To him, I was a sheltered girl that never really struck out on her own, other students that I met in the US were on their own, boys and girls. I don’t think I’d be okay with having my daughter travel on her own. Maybe this can be considered as a double standard. I will probably do like my mom did and travel along with her. In a nutshell, parenting styles in the way you raise your kids is very different than the way that you would like to be raised. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

Salma expressed how safety and fear are the two major elements that have fed into the making of this discourse. She said, “I would fear for my girl. What if somebody bothers her, what if somebody....what if she is approached by men and she is young and doesn’t know what to do.” She added that she would like to be there with her if she decides to live or study abroad so she can at least supervise or be there from afar. “A lot of things can go wrong and I want to make sure that they don’t. In our perspective the motive is good, but from her perspective, we may be constricting her freedom do whatever she wants. It’s too bad,” she said as she giggled. Drawing on Day (2000, p. 109), the way in which gender identities are constructed frequently underscores the vulnerability of women and underpins the belief that women are endangered in public spaces.

Moving on from the discussion on fear and safety, Salma spoke of how gender is reinforced from the moment of birth, as she witnessed in the hospital where she gave birth to her children and as she began to buy them toys:

I think everything about toys, baby toys and toddler toys, definitely reinforces gender differences starting from even color. From the hospital doors you can always tell who had a boy and who had a girl because if there is a pink flower on a door, it is a girl, if there is a blue sticker on the door, it is a boy. The pink and the blue, the Barbies, the houses and the little kitchens for girls. And for boys they do the army, aggressive toys. So one gender is encouraged to be a homemaker and to cook and to clean and to dress a Barbie and to comb her hair, and the other gender is

encouraged to be a go-getter, more aggressive, more dominant, more assertive so we definitely reinforce gender roles and identities but we also create and re-create these personalities in a way. When children play with toys in early childhood, it shapes the way that they think. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

On the same note, Salma recollected a story about her cousin's son, which she used to emphasize how gender is a learnt performance:

My cousin, he has a boy and a girl, and this boy, eight years old, is surrounded by little girls in the family, they are his cousins, and he talks like a girl. He uses Arabic feminine expressions like he is a girl. He wears nail polish. He wears lipstick. He wears a hijab. He's like a little boy and he has no idea he's a boy. That's what he sees, so it is really interesting and up until very recently his father took him in, started taking him to Friday prayers, started talking to him, he started telling him "hey, you are a boy, you are supposed to speak in the masculine expressions"...What's interesting about this story is that it is all about what you see and how you are raised. As a boy, you could be raised with girls and act like a girl or you could be raised with boys and act like a boy. (Personal Interview, November 2014).

A sex category that an individual is assigned to upon birth begins to turn into a gender position through parental practices such as way of dress, and name-giving (Lorber, 1994, p. 55). After a child is assigned a particular gender, children may begin to witness different treatment than other children belonging to another gender (p. 55). When children first learn to talk, they are taught to grammatically and vocally express their gender (p. 55). These are all examples of processes that contribute to the "social construction of gender" (p. 55). But gender is much more than ways of talking or dressing; it implies a social position that individuals may reproduce or resist, which is what my project is attempting to explore.

Finally, Salma was the only person I spoke with in Zamalek who mentioned way of dress as an element through which gender emerged in her family. According to her:

My husband is very traditional, which explains why I am dressed the way I am dressed. After I got married, a lot of the things that were OK before became like major No Nos. I can't stay out late by myself, I can't dress in a certain way, I can't wear tight clothes, I can't wear short sleeves, I can't smoke in public- even though that's debatable sometimes- I can't smoke shisha like I used to, I have to take his

permission when I am going out, stuff that I never even considered before I got married. And stuff that even to me, and to this day, is still very negotiable. I do it out of respect I guess for him. I understand that this is how he was raised and that this is our culture. To me getting married has changed many things about the way I lead my day to day life- I can't say that I am loving it too much but I guess we just have to adapt. I guess that's the story of every girl living in that part of the world. We just have to adapt to the way things are done here. And we do that so that we can survive and because social norms are very hard to change. (Personal Interview, September 2014).

It is easy to take Salma's account at face value and argue that the way in which she chooses to live her life is a form of "oppression," and that is turning into a victim who needs to be "rescued" and be made "aware" of her situation. But Salma grew up travelling to the US every summer, and went to an American school. She was thus fully aware of the "white," "middle-class" feminist discourse, yet she chose to stay in a marriage that might seem "oppressive." To further problematize the matter, I would like to turn to Macleod (1992), who engages with this issue. As Macleod (1992) argues, women have long been portrayed within the narrative of victimhood, as objects of oppression and domination (p. 534). They have also been presented as accepting to their subordinate positions, and as pleased with their inferior position (p. 534). In Muslim societies, the veil (in Salma's case, her modest dress is a lighter form of the veil) has been seen as a sign for their "oppression" (p. 535). However, in recent times, feminists have countered the narrative of victimhood and have presented women as influential actors who exercise a form of concealed, indirect power (p. 534). In this view, women are simultaneously seen as "active subjects" and as "subjects of domination" (p. 534). Macleod builds on this view to contend that women continuously exercise forms of power that transcend the dominant narrative of victimhood, even when they occupy the role of the "subordinate" (p. 534). Women, according to Macleod, are active agents who consent, reject, contest, accommodate, or disregard at all times (p. 534). In fact, as she argues, women, in particular situations, simultaneously consent, reject, contest, accommodate, or disregard (p. 534). Macleod draws on this theory of power and links it to the veil, and she sees the

modest dress of those women as founded on a conflicting statement of “both protest and accommodation” (p. 536). This contradicting statement emerges from a conflict that some women have been facing as they found themselves caught between two worlds: the workplace and the household (p. 547). This has led them to experience a paradox of “identity” and “role” (p. 547). On one hand, women like Salma have graduate degrees, well-paying jobs, and an access to a life outside the household. At the same time, a particular gender ideology exists which emphasizes the role of a woman as a wife, and her place as the home (p. 547). Drawing on Macleod, the contradiction that exists between the reality of Salma’s life and dominant gender ideologies creates a challenging predicament, which has led many women to wear more modest clothing as a way to reassert their identities as mothers and wives (p. 549), while being able to continue to with their lives outside the house. Modest dress has been an instrument to reassert their identities as wives and mothers, and thus, those women cannot be said to be mere acceptors of oppression or requirements of society (p. 551). Furthermore, many women have used the veil and/or modest dress as a tool to prevent public harassment and to reclaim their right to access public spaces (Macleod, 1992, p. 550).

The Story of Farida

Farida is a fifty-three-year-old woman who got married when she was twenty five. She has been separated from her husband for over fifteen years. She told me she had initially wanted to get married because she strongly believed that family is very important, and that she thought of marriage as a natural extension to the family she had. This resonates with Bourdieu’s contention that family appears to be the most natural and universal element though it is a mere subjective social construct (1996, p. 21). When she was asked about power, the first thing that came to her mind was financial and emotional support. According to Farida, “Power in the family means the

person who can support financially and emotionally. To me power resonates mainly with money. But money is not the only aspect of power, but also a person that you can get back to, and who can support you emotionally.” After taking some time to think, she said, “even more importantly, power is the bond that connects all the members of the family together. This is the main thing....to have support financially and emotionally through this bond in spite of differences.”

Farida, like everyone else, has her own unique story. After meeting with her several times, it was clear that the financial problems that she had while married and after separation are the primary reasons as to why she found the element of money to be the most important. She told me that her husband used money as means to control her and her two daughters, who are now twenty six and twenty one years old. When I asked about the apartment that she lived in, which look tired but was still located on an affluent Zamalek street, she told me that the reason why she lives in this apartment is that her husband’s family owned the place for a long time. Through a lengthy narration of her married life, pre-marital, and post-marital periods, Farida traced the modes through which her understanding of gender has changed and how simultaneously her own subjectivity was reconstructed. As Farida told me:

When it comes to gender, I’ve been through different phases. The first phase, when I was in my twenties and early thirties, I used to think to a great extent that the main role of the man is to support of the family financially and emotionally and the role of the woman is to raise kids and to support the family emotionally- even if she supports financially she should be a secondary source of financial support not the primary source. However, women should seek [paid] work, and have to have a share in the house (extra money to buy the things that the man cannot provide, not for the husband but for the kids and herself). (Personal Interview, October 2014).

Farida told me that this scenario (above) was what she saw as the “ideal” scenario when she was in her twenties and early thirties. Reality, however, was very different, as she told me.

Growing up, my parents used to fight a lot but there was mutual respect and love. This is what I was seeking. When I got engaged, when something went wrong, my

then fiancé used to apologize with respect. He used to give me the impression that he didn't have the upper hand and that we were equals. After we got married, he became very aggressive, wanted everything to go his way. The turning point was that right after the honeymoon when his mother told me "if you want to work it means that you will have to pay all your salary in the house," which I did. Although he didn't do what was expected of him (to financially and emotionally support), he wanted to have the upper hand. He used to work in a bank when we got married, and I worked at a bank, and we both equally participated in everything. I used to make a little bit more. After two years of marriage, he was offered a job in tourism. He left the bank and took this job. After a few months, the economic crisis came about (in the early nineties) due to the Luxor attacks that took place. He got laid off. Then I went to work as a school teacher...I left the bank to have less working hours so I can take care of my first kid. (Personal Interview, December 2014).

Farida sounded devastated when she told me that she found herself supporting the house totally at that time, and only got two hundred and fifty pounds from her father-in-law. She said this situation lasted for about three years, which "made him even worse, he became more aggressive, he used to leave the house for days, he started doing things that I didn't understand at that time....he started making ceramic decorative products." She paused and added, "Since then I knew that this marriage is terrible in every respect. She continued to tell me that her husband became very aggressive and that she didn't know how to talk to him at all, and added that everybody around her didn't want to talk to him, even the janitor. "Just because he was a man, he thought he had the upper hand in everything, and that he can be aggressive and offensive," she said. But the imbalance of power in Farida's relationship with her husband has made Farida question her beliefs about gender responsibilities and power in the family. She told me:

After everything deteriorated, I thought that everything that I believed in was totally wrong. What I thought was wrong is that I shouldn't have gotten married in the first place until I was totally independent and could support myself. The belief at this time was that the man is the breadwinner and that he would turn out good and so on. This was the turning point in a lot of beliefs that I had. I felt that I was not only wrong but was crazy to do that. I felt trapped. Even if he would have turned out good, gradually, when I began to distance myself from my mother, my beliefs started to change as I started to realize a lot of things. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

The role of Farida's mother will be discussed in detail shortly. Importantly, while Farida's everyday experience in her marriage has pushed her to rethink her own position in her marriage, her main focus at this particular phase of her life was survival. It is true that she lived in a good (though dated) apartment in Zamalek, but that did not reflect her income at that time. She told me her salary was very limited and her daughters' needs were on the rise. The apartment where she lived and continues to live in is owned by her husband who used to threaten to sell the apartment, which made her live in fear of being left on the street, she told me. In fact, Farida stayed for periods in her mother's apartment, as she narrated:

At some point, my husband left the house and travelled for work, and I went to my mother's house with my first child. A while after I told him I want to go back to our house. He said if we go back we will have to get a divorce. He said so because he wanted to remain independent on all of us...on my mother, and on his father's money. Once my kid became a bit older and had to go to school, we had to move back as the school was next to our house. At this point, his business became a bit better and he improved. In the same year I got pregnant with my second child. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

I asked Farida about why she stayed in her marriage despite her realizing that it is not good for her, she mentioned that she was afraid. She was afraid her husband will not help with her daughter's expenses if she left him. I also asked her why she had a second child under those circumstances. She told me her mother pressured her to do so, something which I will discuss shortly. But she also told me that when she had her second child in 1994, the situation in the household was slightly better because her husband started to make money and his business improved. She said his "character" improved as a result. "Back then all my focus was that I wanted to have a second child to support the first child. This was among the main reasons I had a second child. I thought that by time things may get better...he might get better," she told me. Once again, it is worth highlighting the way in which fear operates. When survival is at cost, women might choose to stay in destructive marriages in order to avoid possible unfavorable consequences. If we

are to look at Farida's situation through Kandiyoti's (1991) notion of "the patriarchal bargain," it would be possible to argue that women might accept and follow the societal beliefs, obey the rules, and even enforce them on others, in order to maintain their positions. As Kandiyoti argues, what women think they are to achieve or lose in a certain historical context will determine their opposition or conformity to a system. Because Farida feared what she might lose if she left her husband, she felt the need to accept her marriage as it is and follow what society dictates as the "right thing to do." Farida, thus, was an active agent in the reproduction of a particular power dynamic in her marriage, and of her own gender subjectivity.

Farida told me that this "change" in her husband's attitude did not last for long. Not only that, but she discovered his "infidelity." According to Farida:

When my younger kid was around seven years old, my husband came one night and said that he was having an affair with a woman, and that he has a two-year-old-daughter with her, but that this wasn't intended and it was a casual relationship. He also told me that he told the woman from the beginning that he can leave her anytime and that this is not a permanent arrangement. He told me that he was going to leave her and that it was a mistake. Even though my mother told me not to get divorced, and my husband told me he was not going to divorce me, it was over. We got separated but we didn't get a divorce because I didn't have the power or the finances to support myself and the kids, and my mother told me that if I get divorced, he will not pay for anything. And things stayed like this. Also my husband said I respect you and what I did doesn't mean that she is better than you. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

Farida said that since then, she has been living alone in the Zamalek apartment with her daughters. She added that for months, she knew nothing about him, but he occasionally sent money for school fees which "was a hassle," as she put it. "He used to skip months without sending any money. At this time, I had a lot of problems at work but I couldn't quit and I had to tolerate everything because I was the sole provider for the house. Any month that he paid the school fees he wouldn't pay the house fees," Farida told me. Kandiyoti's argument cited above regarding the "patriarchal bargain" continues to apply. Farida's acceptance of a particular situation that she

deemed unfavorable is rooted in her inability to financially provide for her children and in her fear of being on her own. But let us not dismiss the amount of pressure that this perspective puts on men. A man, in Farida's scenario, needs to be the main provider for the house. This should not be overlooked if we are to think about her husband's actions. Importantly, Farida drew on her experience and told me about how she understands gender in the family. According to her:

What makes a man a man and woman a woman is a physical thing. But women are more patient and more tolerant. This is how women were raised. In my family, I was much more tolerant my husband. Women are expected to be more tolerant and patient, and men are more aggressive. Most of my girlfriends are more tolerant and patient as they've been raised this way. It is more common for men to leave the house and be irresponsible, but this rarely happens with women. Women's motherly instincts make them more attached to their kids and more responsible. However, an aunt of mine is an exception. She left her husband and her kids. The only time she wanted to see her kids is when they went to the US and she wanted to go on a trip. She comes first. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

While gender is not a static identity or position, and while daily acts make an illusion of an "eternal gendered self," to borrow Butler's (1988, p. 519) words, Farida understands gender as a naturally occurring category with particular meanings and traits tied to it. It might be that in Farida's case, the repetitive nature of acts of tolerance on the women's side, and aggression/irresponsibility on the men's side that are rooted in the social construction of a particular gendered self has led to the formation of certain illusory gender identities that appear as natural and ever-present. Yet she stated that those normative characteristics cannot be applied to every individual, like her aunt, whom she viewed as an exception, nevertheless.

Of particular importance to the narrative of Farida are her parents, particularly her mother. Farida's mother, in her words, came from an "aristocratic" family. Her grandfather was a prominent lawyer, and her grandmother passed away when her mother was only sixteen. Shortly after, her mother was married off to her father who was a successful doctor. Her mother took care of the house of children, and her father worked between the Gulf and the UK. After her father's

early death in his thirties, Farida's mother, who wasn't the best "money manager," according to Farida, had all their inheritance spent on their education at AUC, trips to Europe, and Farida's sister's hospital fees as she was sick for a period of time. With regards to her parents, she told me:

My father used to provide for everything. My mother had a piece of land and a building that brought some little income that she used to spend the way she likes and he had nothing to do with it. When it came to finances, they had a total understanding that he wouldn't do anything without getting back to her. They both had issued official authorization letters to each other. Most of my parents' arguments were about money as my mother liked to spend and my father wanted to save for the future. He put all his money in a joint account between me, my mother, him and my sister. The bank account was in London. When he passed away, everything became very easy and we were able to easily cash the money. My father also believed women should work, but my mother didn't like to work. She tried but she got bored very quickly. My father got her a job at Cairo University when we were younger but she left it as she got bored. We had maids and a cook, she was spoiled, had no responsibility. She used to have coffee with our neighbor every morning and had maids. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

When Farida compared her mother's life to her own, she felt that her mother performed a "simple" role and could have done more with her life. While her mother did not perform housework, as she hired domestic labor, she took the responsibility of raising the children. Farida also saw her father's role as the sole-provider to have made her mother's life easier, which she felt was far from the life she had. Her perspective places her mother within a framework of "passivity" to an extent. This is further emphasized in the way she spoke about her mother's role in her marriage. To go back to Farida's marriage, and as earlier mentioned, Farida said her mother pressured her to have a second child. She also told me that her mother influenced her decision to not leave her husband despite of what was happening. On that same matter, she further told me:

My problem at that time is that it would have made sense to break up a long time ago. But I was very weak at that time that I didn't want to get into the hassle of divorce. Plus, mother used to tell me to stay, you know if my mother was stronger and would have provided support at that time, things would have been different. But of course, she did the opposite. This scared me because I felt there is no support

at this time. She used to say let things stay the way they are and try to make things work. She believed in this, and maybe part of it is because she hasn't been in a marriage like this so she didn't know how it's like to be in such a marriage. Also, I was sure that it was because she thought that things would get worse...financially mainly...even though thinking of this right now it doesn't make any sense. But I don't want to blame her, because I wasn't strong either. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

So far, with the exception of Salma, my interlocutors' stories have revealed a very minor direct parental influence on children's decisions. But Farida's case is different. Through the reinforcement of the discourse of fear, Farida's mother has had an influence on Farida's decision not to leave her marriage. Her mother's belief that things would "get worse" if she did leave her marriage has supported the reproduction of the unequal relationship of power that Farida had in her marriage. The discourse of "fearing the unknown" is employed as a mode to legitimize particular social practices that might adversely affect subject positions, as it did with Farida. On the other hand, Farida believed that things would have been different if her father was still alive. She said:

I am sure that if my father was around things would have been better because he had a very strong character and he would never accept that anybody would treat me like this. Even though he passed away when I was young, he was very dignified...he would have killed my husband for doing this! This was his character, it is not because he was a man. This is how he was raised. Both his parents and his sister have a very strong character as well. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

While Farida made it clear that her father would have not allowed this to happen because of his strong character not his gender, it is still useful to reflect on the different positions of power that Farida assigns to each of her parents. While she saw her mother as "conforming" in a way, she saw her father as capable of actively confronting the situation of his daughter. This helped to mentally construct a particular gendered image of the different positions of her mother and father, as well as what each is capable of. It is also worth noting that Farida's narrative about her grandparents is very similar her narrative about her parents. She told me that her grandfather, who

was born in the twenties, was very open minded, and he adored her grandmother. She added that he was a very big lawyer who spoiled her mother. “People have a misconception about older generations, families used to spoil the girls not the boys,” she said. I sensed a tone of self-victimization in Farida’s voice when she spoke about how her mother and grandmother were “treated.” It was clear that she views herself within a narrative of victimhood, and this was amplified when she compared her marital and familial experience with that of her mother and grandmother.

Farida’s daughters turned out very different than her, as she told me. “My children have different beliefs than myself,” she said. She told me that Dana, her oldest daughter, recently got married. She explained that she and her husband are equal partners in the marriage, which she said made her challenge her beliefs about the breadwinning responsibility being a man’s chore.

According to Farida:

I tried to enforce my new beliefs on my kids, the things that I acquired from my experience. I think the woman should not get married unless she can support herself. I used to think and tell my daughters that the man should support the house and that she should keep most of her money to herself. But after what I saw around me, I figured out that my beliefs are still wrong and that it doesn’t matter who makes more, or who spends, as long as my daughters have careers and are able to support themselves. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

Gender ideology is non-static and evolves with social interaction, as Farida’s narrative reveals.

But Farida did not only imply her changing gender beliefs in terms of money, but in terms of other elements as well. She told me:

My beliefs used to be much more rigid, I used to tell my older daughter not to come back late because I fear that people in the neighborhood to see her. But now this is not my fear. I only fear for her security. Even if I think that my beliefs are right, I never try to enforce them on my kids. I will feel very bad if my kids want to do something even if I don’t like it, and I prevent them from doing it. I don’t mind that my younger daughter comes back at four in the morning, I am only concerned because it is a terrible country with terrible security. I don’t mind her coming back

late because she is a girl, but because society treats girls worse. If she comes back late, I fear for her safety. I know men can harass her when she is driving late at night. Also, I am perfectly ok with her majoring in acting, I am perfectly ok with it. I am perfectly ok with her travelling on her own, unlike most people. The only fear I have of her travelling alone is not that she is a girl but because she is unorganized and irresponsible. She always talks about being independent, but she doesn't apply this. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

While the belief that girls are endangered in public spaces dominates Farida's narrative, she did emphasize that gender beliefs are something that we can pause and reflect upon, and not something that is natural and fixed. Farida further told me that her younger daughter does not want to get married but wants to have a child outside of wedlock:

My younger daughter wants to have a kid without being married. But the reason why I disagree with it is because it is the right of a child to have both parents. This way, she is being very selfish by trying to satisfy a need that she has but she is not thinking about the child. It is crazy to decide that her child won't have a father. To her, this comes from the desire to not be committed to someone else. Partly this comes from her childhood issues, eighty percent of this might have come from her father being the way he was. I think this is true even if she denies it. If she had had a good father, she would have wanted this for her kids. (Personal Interview, October 2014).

Even with a major decision such as this one, Farida told me that if her daughter decides she wants to have a child outside of wedlock in the future, she will give her daughter her opinion but will not force her to marry. This particular aspect of Farida's narrative is interesting because it is uncommon for parents to accept a grandchild born outside of wedlock in Egyptian families. Farida's opposition to her daughter's idea was more about her belief that single-parenting is difficult, as she experienced it first-hand, than about moral disciplining. The belief that the hymen should be protected and safeguarded was not reflected in Farida's narrative, unlike the narratives of Salma and Sameh, for instance. As a final note, Farida's contention that her daughter might have formed a particular adverse idea about "men" based on her experience with her father points to that some children may unconsciously form gender beliefs founded on their interactions with their parents.

The Story of Suzan

The account of Suzan, is of a slightly unique nature because she was one of the first few women in the country to make use the *khul'* (no-fault divorce) law. Furthermore, her case is different than the rest because her husband lived and worked in the Gulf for the entire course of their marriage. Suzan is a seventy-five-year-old woman who has been living in Zamalek for over thirty five years. She is divorced and has two children, a boy and a girl who are both in their fifties. Suzan began her narrative by telling me that she was a housewife all her life, and her late ex-husband was a doctor who worked in the Gulf, as mentioned above. She stayed home and took care of the house and kids. "Generally speaking women have a better vision than men. My husband was good at work, but I had "ten hands." I had maids all my life but I was able to cook, answer the phone, clean up and help children with their studies all at the same time," she told me. She added that all her efforts were focused on running the house and taking care of her children, and that her husband never had an active role as a father. "The children saw him only one month a year during his vacation and it wasn't a pleasant time at all for me and for the kids alike," she explained.

At first, it appeared that Suzan had a particular gendered arrangement with her husband, in which she takes care of the house and he provides for it, which provides insight on how household divisions of labor are organized and how they are affected by the workings of socially-constructed gendered beliefs (Lawson, 1998). But in the case of Suzan, it is worth looking at how gender power relations in her household were being produced and reproduced across transnational space. In fact, geographic work on gender and migration offers significant insight about the ways in which gender relations are constructed and negotiated by means of spatial mobility/immobility (Silvey, 2006). According to Gilbert (1998), some women are able to utilize their limited spatial mobility and use it to their benefit, which challenges the dominant belief that views the lack of mobility as a

disadvantage and mobility as a privilege. It is clear from Suzan's account that the distant relationship that she and her children had with her husband has affected the way her family operated. But there is more to Suzan's story. She told me her marriage didn't last because her husband never disclosed how much he earned:

The most important component of a marriage relationship is honesty. The man should let his wife know everything about his income and his future plans. I never knew my husband's exact income. He never thought about how I would live if he passes away. I think he wanted to humiliate me. (Personal Interview, August 2014).

She told me that she used a formal authorization certificate that her husband had issued to her to sell some of his assets to herself while he was in the Gulf, including her Zamalek apartment. Certainly, I am not in a position nor is it my task to critique the morality of any of my interlocutor's actions. What interests me is how Suzan utilized her spatial immobility to secure financial resources, albeit through means some might consider questionable. Her husband's absence allowed her to undertake a particular mode of power that she might not have been able to undertake if he were living with her. Following the sale of the assets to herself, she filed for *Khul'* divorce. "I filed a case against my husband in court demanding a *khul'* and after lots of efforts, I was granted one," she said. "I was among the first few women in Egypt to be granted the *Khul'*. I felt it was a huge victory," Suzan added.

Suzan recollects memories her parents, who passed away over thirty years ago. She told me her mother "was a strong woman, she was active and alert." She added that her father assumed a managerial position at the ministry of education and used to go to work at seven in the morning sharp. "He was very strict at work and highly organized," she said. He came back from work at half-past two every afternoon and stayed at home for the rest of the day. "On the other hand, my mother took care of the house chores, we had at least two maids to help and my mother supervised them closely," she explained. Suzan added that sometimes her mother had visits from friends and

relatives in the morning, and in the afternoon she went out with her father to visit friends and relatives or to go to a restaurant or the cinema. Suzan described her parents' life as ideal, something which she thought was far away from the marriage she had. "As a child, I've never seen by mother and father fight, sometimes there was some tension at home, but as children we have never seen our mother and father fight. They always did this in private," she added. She also explained that her father always took her mother's opinion before making any decision.

Regarding her mother, she told me, "As children, my mother always used to take my brother's side, unlike my father who was very fair. Even when I became a mother she always took my son's side. It was obvious that she prefers boys and this was the case then in many other families." She then paused and added, "I must admit though that in my family girls had the freedom to go out, travel, and not get married. My younger sister was a flight attendant back in the day and my parents never opposed it. She also got married in her forties to a British man, which they also weren't against." This provides important insight on how gender ideology was not necessarily rigid in older generations as widely assumed. While Suzan's mother preferred boys, she and her father did not attempt to exercise excessive control over the daughters, and did not showcase a need to overly supervise a girl's "morals" and "honor." Regarding her mother, Suzan added that she was fair and generous and taught them not to desire what they cannot afford. "She was never a big spender. She used to spend wisely and advised us to do the same," she said. It is worth noting that the idea of class difference is overwhelmingly evident in Suzan's narrative. She told me:

My mother was always kind to less fortunate people. I remember once that I was surprised to see her visit the house janitor's wife to congratulate her on delivering her baby, but she said then that she's doing this to make the woman happy. She said that she will feel as though she's been visited by a king. (Personal Interview, August 2014).

As for her father, she nostalgically remembered him and narrated:

My father was open-minded compared to other fathers at that time. He had a sense of humor and loved to play with his grandchildren. However, he was very strict when it came to our friends and people we go out with. He always preferred that my brother studied at home with his friends rather than going to their houses. We used to live in a two-floor villa where the upper flat was totally devoted to my brother and his friends. My father always said that being strict was not out of mistrust but that he was trying to protect us. He was also wise enough to ignore some of the things that we did wrong, like one time he pretended not to see my brother smoking in order not to embarrass him. My father used to smoke, but he knew this was wrong and didn't want my brother to copy him. (Personal Interview, August 2014).

Thus, although Suzan was born in the early 1940s, her father did not exercise a supreme form of power over her and her siblings, and did not distinguish between boys and girls. She added that her father was very attached to his family, he “loved to help me pack my bag before travelling to my husband when he worked in Saudi Arabia,” she said. Furthermore, “When he passed away, my mother found in his cupboard a letter that he wrote her to thank her for the lovely years he lived with her and to say sorry if he ever made her sad,” she nostalgically recollected. Thus, while Suzan's parents' relationship entailed a gendered distribution of labor, Suzan never saw her father as the most dominant nor as the person with the greater power, as others have described their marital relationships and their parents' relationships.

Before moving on from Suzan's parents, it is worth pointing out that despite the fact that I never brought up the issue of maids with Suzan, which is beyond the scope of my project, she brought that up a few times. Because of how strongly she felt about the issue, I felt the need to include her narrative about domestic labor. According to Suzan:

In my parent's house, we always had maids to help with the house chores and they knew exactly what was required of them. Now maids are terrible. And they need to be instructed constantly. This is a big problem. I strongly believe that people should be allowed to have foreign maids to help at home. This will pressure Egyptian maids to work harder to withstand the competition. They need to feel humiliated in order to work. We strongly need trained domestic labor in Egypt. Egyptian workers are very hard to train. It is much easier to train animals. (Personal Interview, August 2014).

As I earlier mentioned when I was looking at Nazly's story, the delegation of reproductive work to domestic workers and the way in which this matter intersects with race and class is beyond the scope of my research. That being said, domestic labor is a prevalent "commodity" that is bought by women of race and class privilege. (Parrenas, 2000, p. 561). As Suzan's narrative shows, the process of commodification of domestic labor has maintained a division of reproductive labor that is closely tied to race and class, which in turn created an unequal structure amongst women (Nakano Glenn, 1992). But Suzan takes this further; not only does her narrative place Egyptian domestic labor in a "lesser" category than herself, but it extremely dehumanizes them.

As mentioned earlier, Suzan has a son and a daughter. She told me that throughout their childhood, her husband was always travelling for work so she was totally responsible for raising the children. She added that her mother, who used to live with them, helped her a lot with this. In raising her two children, she said, "I used to threaten my son and daughter that they will not get their allowance or go out when they were young in order to listen to me and it worked." This provides inside about modes of power that parents exercise over young children. But she said that this strategy did not work for long. As soon as the children got older, they stopped listening to her or agreeing with her views, as she said. Suzan appeared particularly saddened by how her son "turned out," as she put it. According to her:

When my son became an adult, he started copying his father. I never expected him to turn out to be like this, especially because I spoiled him and treated him better than his sister. He was always loved by his dad and was closer to him than his sister. My son goes on for months without talking to me. In fact, it has been a year and a half since I heard from him. His dad was partly responsible for how he turned out as he always made promises to buy him expensive things to keep him on his side. My husband had a very negative effect on our children particularly my son. (Personal Interview, August 2014).

Because her son was closer to his father, he was against Suzan's decision to pursue the *Khul'* divorce. But Suzan told me she went through the process despite her son's disagreement, and she

thought he had nothing to do with this decision. Importantly, her son's close relationship with his father is not the only reason for why she thought she had an unstable relationship with him. She told me that her daughter-in-law has total control over him, and tries to keep him away from his family as much as she can. She also described her as "greedy":

She kept pushing my son to leave his job and start his own private business to satisfy her wants. They already have an expensive summer house in the north coast and a villa in a very luxurious residential compound in Cairo and yet she wants to put her hands on the entire property of the family. I believe young women now have the upper hand in most of the marital relationships. Take my son for example, his wife takes all the decisions on his behalf and he follows. (Personal Interview, August 2014).

Suzan's narrative reveals that some younger women are able to exercise a significant amount of power over their husbands. Contrary to the dominant idea that the mother-in-law is the most powerful woman in the family, Suzan is unable to control her son's actions in any way. For this reason, Suzan told me she regrets how she raised her children:

I regret now that I always treated my son better than my daughter. I always asked her to do things for him that he was too lazy to do for himself. I thought then that boys need more care and attention; otherwise they will seek it outside. I was very wrong and the outcome was terrible. But sometimes I did this because I felt that my daughter is more sensible and responsible. (Personal Interview, August 2014).

It is clear the way in which some parents treat their children is tied to dominant gender ideology. The attachment of particular beliefs to being a "woman" (e.g. responsible and sensible), as well as the attachment of certain beliefs to being a "man" (e.g. needing extra attention) has led some parents' to adopt a gendered model in raising their children. Importantly, it is worth realizing how parents, through life experiences, sometimes modify their views regarding gendered modes of treatment and rearing of children that are closely tied to the aforementioned connotations attached to the gender binary.

The Story of Omar

The masculine/feminine model was also brought up by Omar, a thirty-year-old marketing research consultant who is married with two children, a boy and a girl:

A man doesn't symbolize power and a woman doesn't symbolize weakness. I think the man is the backbone and support. My wife and I could be facing the same problems in life, but at some point she will lean on me. I should take care of her at this point. At the end of the day the man is the protector. A man is synonymous with security. But in our world now a man no longer the sole provider, women now work and are capable of anything. Sometimes you can find wives in higher positions than their husbands. The game has changed. Though women are now stronger, the man remains the support (Personal Interview, January 2015).

Similar to other people I spoke with, the social construction of the masculine/feminine binary is evident in Omar's account. His account was also very similar to that of Mohamed, and Sameh, the older men whose accounts were presented earlier in this chapter. This was particularly evident when he told me:

My wife and I discuss things with each other all the time, and I take her opinion on almost everything and she takes my opinion on everything. We frequently have prolonged discussions. Usually we reach an agreement together. At times one of us goes with what the other thinks just to get things moving. But if we disagree, we go with what I think. When we go in loops and things boil down to bottlenecks, we go with what I think. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

Omar's account on how discussions work in his household is perhaps less gendered than many of the accounts presented earlier. His account clearly shows that a process of negotiation takes place in the household. Yet, a desire to reaffirm a particular gendered subjectivity was still evident in Omar's words. He also viewed decision-making capacity as the main definer of power. Further, he saw marriage to comprise a series of gendered tasks, something which he felt very strongly about:

Of course I have different responsibilities than my wife. I work and when I get back home I help her out around the house and with the kids. Her main role is taking care of the house and the kids. Now that we had kids, they have become her main priority and she no longer has a paid job. She used to be a French teacher at a nursery. She now takes care of the house, raises the kids, and creates a spirit in the

house...because the woman is the one who gives the house a spirit, not the man. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

He then paused and added:

Religion stresses the importance of women having an independent personality and a good position. It urges men to respect women and take care of them. Religion gave to men and women their natural biological roles. For instance, a woman gives her kids love, a woman breastfeeds....a man can't do that. When my wife was pregnant, she used to talk to the baby and give him love. I didn't start communicating with him until he was six months old. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

Omar viewed gender, with all meanings attached to it, as a natural, biological, ever-existing category. But perhaps what was particularly interesting is that he saw housework as “nonproductive,” which points to how little reproductive work is valued even in the generation of Omar. While he thought his wife assumed her “natural,” “biological” role by taking care of the children, he thought he would be “nonproductive” if he were to play the role of the caretaker:

It is not acceptable for me as a man to stay at home and for my wife to work and provide for the house. I am with my wife being able to work, but I should also be working...unless there are circumstances that force us to that. If that happens, I wouldn't be frustrated that wife is providing for the house, but I will be frustrated for not being productive. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

But Omar's age is a significant element through which the non-static nature of gendered subjectivities can be traced. He told me:

I feel that I am more understanding when it comes to my wife than my father used to be towards my mother. I also feel that my grandparents were more like my wife and I. I feel that they are closer to me and my wife in terms of how we deal with each other. I feel that I am more included in the process of the raising the kids....I can change the diapers, clean the floors, I don't have an issue with that. My dad used to do the same thing in the house, but I feel that I am more involved in these things. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

Omar's narrative points to that the line has blurred between the tasks each partner is expected to assume. While Omar's wife has left her paid job to stay home and take care of the children, Omar still plays an active role around the house. He is not simply a “money-making machine,” as

narratives of older men like Mohamed and Sameh have implied. For example, he told me that he makes sure he is involved with his family, and would not leave his wife and children and travel on his own work in the Gulf like his father did:

When I was a boy, my dad used to go to work in the mornings, come back and take a nap, and then leave for work again in the evening. Most of my relatives and friends' parents were like that. He used to travel to the Gulf alone for work. We don't have this now. If I get a job abroad, I would take my family with me. I am more of a caregiver than he was. Even though I get back late from work, I spend some quality time with my family. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

He further explained to me that a shared form of power where both parties participate in decision making is ideal. "I don't think dominance as a concept is a good one. I think couples whose marriages work have respect and communication. If one of them is not present, then a marriage is a failure," he said. He explained that a friend of his wanted to buy a house at a place that he really liked, but his wife didn't want it, so he ended up not buying it. "That, to me, is dominance, something which I do not appreciate," he added.

Omar added that with his mother and father, he felt that they both have equal power, more or less. "It is not my dad who has the final word, they negotiate things between them," he said. Omar told me that his father is recently retired, does freelance consultancy, and his mother is a housewife. According to Omar, his mother was the primary caregiver not only to her direct family members, but to her parents and extended family as well:

My mother only worked for a few years after she graduated. She took care of all the family, including us and her parents, who all used to live in the same house. She was the main caregiver to all family members especially after my uncle, her brother, passed away. She doesn't work in order to fulfill that role. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

In the case of Omar's mother, he implied that her caregiving work was highly valued, and was not considered of less importance than the paid job that his father had. In fact, he told me that her caregiving role has enhanced her position in the family, which he defined as the ability to "contain

other family members” as well as the ability to participate in decision-making. In fact, he said “I don’t see my father as the symbol of power, a lot of times he would listen to my mother despite him wanting to do the exact opposite.” In Omar’s parents’ house, he mentioned that responsibilities were allocated among his mother and father. As he said:

My mother used to handle our school and studying, and if some issue escalated she would go my father. But she used to be the gatekeeper of that matter. My father handled the more “strategic” part. For instance, although he didn’t give much advice to us, he would every now and then give us advice that would last for a lifetime! He is the one that talks less but has the biggest impact on us. My mother handled the household domain, and my father was the provider yet he took care of us but held the more “fun” part of taking care of us, as well as when we had big problems that needed to be escalated to him. Because I work in business management, I would describe her as the tactical partner and him as the strategic partner. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

In the household of Omar’s parents, a gendered division of labor is present in which each parent took care of a particular set of roles, and the mother was more involved in the disciplining and the raising of the children, which is similar to most households that have been presented so far.

As previously stated, Omar has two young children, a boy and a girl. They are still toddlers, but he believes that there would be a slight difference in the way he intends to raise each of them:

I would probably spoil the girl more than the boy. I can’t spoil my boy...men shouldn’t be spoiled. We have to be tough with the boy. When my boy is older, I would want to give him freedom to go out and experience things on his own. This is how I was raised and it gave me “street smartness.” With a girl, I can do the same but in a much censored way. I would want her to see different things, streets and slums. But if the boy comes back from the street with a cut in his knee, I would just wash his leg...this doesn’t apply for a girl. I don’t want my girl to have to go through tougher experiences. I want her to have a wide exposure but I would kill any man who would come near her. I can be more flexible with the boy. Part of the reason for why I think this way is security and the nature of our society. That being said, I wouldn’t put too much emphasis on her coming back late, for instance, and what society dictates when it comes to that. (Personal Interview, January 2015).

As the narratives of Salma and others have implied, and to draw on Day (2000, p. 109), gender identities are constructed in a way that frequently views women as vulnerable and endangered

beings in need of protection. Consequently, some parents may feel that girls need to be given more attention and to be subjected to greater restrictions. Furthermore and as previously mentioned, the narrative of fear implies an emphasis on a girl's sexuality, which some parents feel the need to closely monitor. Omar, as a father, views himself as the protector of his daughter against other "dangerous" men who may try to approach her. This, in turn, helps produce and reproduce a society in which men are seen as predators and women as victims.

Summary

This chapter has presented the accounts of five women and three men from Zamalek. Despite the many similarities among those women and men, their narratives have revealed that the intricate workings of gender and power vary between and among families. The way in which my interlocutors spoke of the differences between how gender is performed in the everyday in their own households and how it is/was performed in their parents' and grand parents' households provides insight about the ever-changing and evolving nature of gender. While it can be said that most individuals subscribed to the gender division of labor model, it is worth noting that women did not see this as "oppression," as dominant narratives often suggest, but as something that was closely tied to their identity as women and that they were not enforced to assume. Nevertheless, housework was generally less valued than paid work, which has contributed to the production and reproduction of unequal familial systems of power. Moreover, most individuals subscribed to the notion of the gender binary, attached particular elements to it, and saw it as natural and ever-occurring. It was also common among the men to attempt to display a particular image of themselves as "masculine" and "powerful."

It is not possible to sketch a model of how power operates in Zamalek families, as this varies among and between families. For the most part, the men defined themselves as the more

powerful, and mainly understood power to encompass decision-making capacity. Sameh and Mohamed, in particular, tied power to money implying a modernist influence. Huda felt that her late husband had the greater power in her marriage, something which she upheld and was comfortable with. In fact, she did not wish to see some of the aspects which she had power over as “power” in order to maintain a particular image of her husband. She wished to reproduce this arrangement with her children and grandchildren, but she has limited influence over their individual lives. Nazly, on the other hand, felt that she had comparable power to her husband in her marriage, but was not satisfied that her husband did not assume more power, which she said would have made her more “comfortable” as she would not have had to make many decisions herself. Interestingly, the relationship of money to gender and power in the family heavily emerged throughout this chapter. Salma was not satisfied that she made more money than her husband, but used this aspect as a negotiation tactic. Suzan used her spatial immobility during her husband’s absence to sell his assets to herself. Farida said that she stayed in her dysfunctional marriage because her husband had the money and she needed to support her two children.

Throughout the chapter, it was also clear that while parents adopt gendered child-rearing, children actively exercise resistance and rarely adopt to their parents’ beliefs about gender. When they do, they actively embrace those beliefs because they are convinced by them. Perhaps Farida is the only interlocutor who was heavily influenced by her mother’s views which greatly relied on the discourse of fearing the unknown, but she actively resisted this discourse later on in her life with her children. Finally, the discourse of honor and safety was evident throughout the chapter and was perhaps the main aspect through which parents adopted gendered treatment. Girls were repeatedly seen as endangered and in need of protection from men, and their “morals” was seen as something to be monitored.

Chapter Three: Gender in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima Families: production, power and resistance

‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima: The Setting

The area of ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab is a part of Al-Fustat area in Misr Al-Qadima (old Cairo). The area of Al-Fustat, Misr Al-Qadima is quite diverse yet families residing in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab are part of a tightly knit community. While Al-Fustat was Egypt’s first capital after Muslims entered the country (Akl et al., 2014, p. 2), today the smell of burning trash dominates the area. The 1992 earthquake has led to the destruction of many houses in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab (Akl et al., 2014, p. 4). According to the area’s inhabitants, many of the demolished houses’ owners recently rebuilt the houses and began renting them out to young families and those who are about to marry (Akl et al., 2014, p. 4). On the alleys of ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, we can see children running around, men hanging out at local coffee houses, women cleaning their houses’ entrances, and goats tied to houses’ gates. In fact, most of the people I visited own goats and chickens, and when I was with Soha, one of the women I frequently visited and spoke with in the area, one of her goats ran away, and she asked me to help her chase it to get it back. Of particular significance to the ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab community, as I have observed and as Akl et al. (2014) has noted, is the level of familiarity among its inhabitants. That is, the majority of the area’s inhabitants frequently interact with each other. In fact, as I walked through the alleys of the area with Soha, we were greeted by other women whom she clearly knew well. This, however, does not mean that individuals viewed others favorably at all times. In fact, many of my respondents frequently said that people from the area do not help each other as they used to, something which many attributed to the declining economic conditions that made each person increasingly concerned about feeding their own children, leaving no time or resources to support other people in the community. Nevertheless,

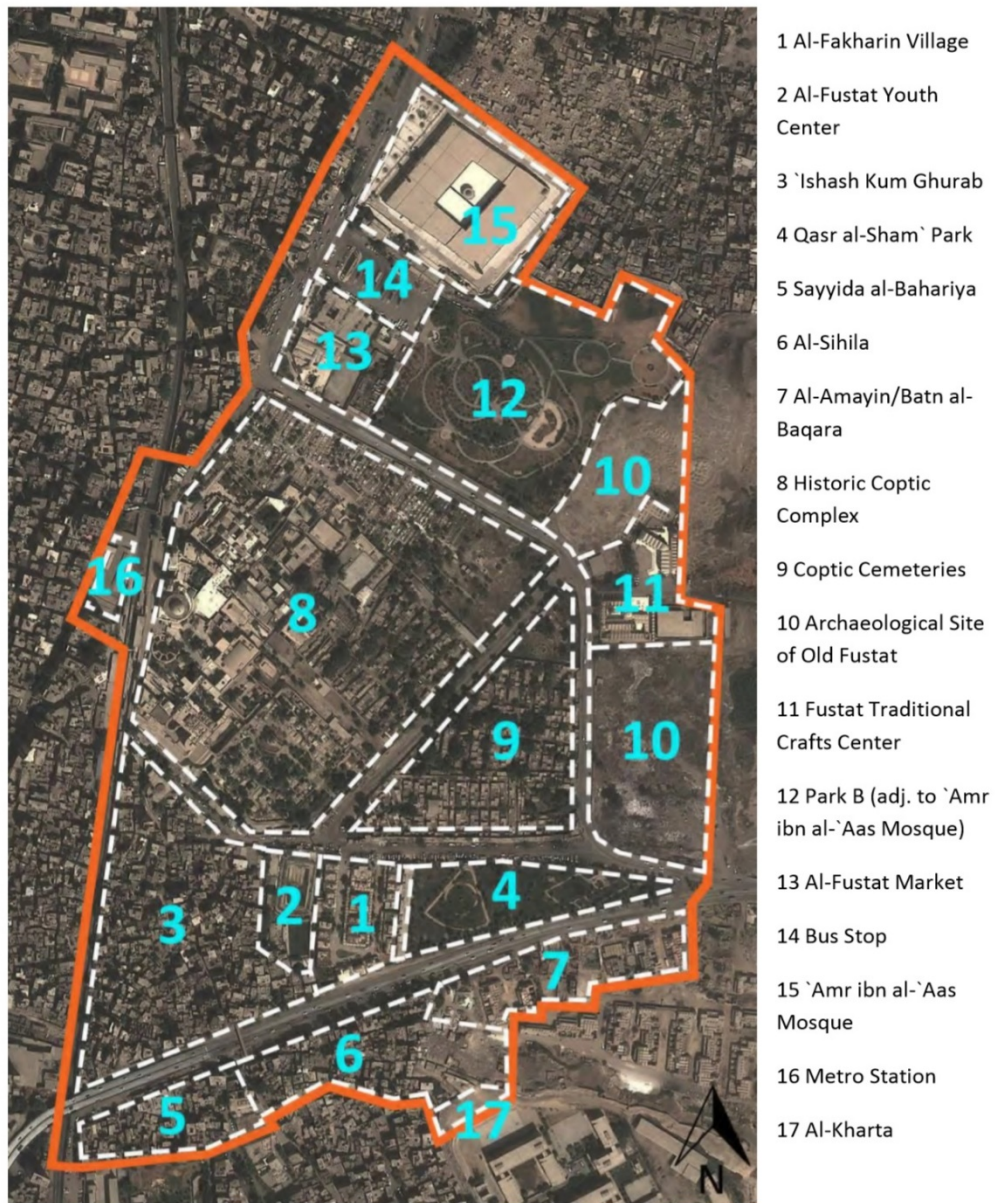


Figure 1: Al-Fustat, Misr Al-Qadima (Akl et al., 2014, p. 2).

from my own experience, families in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab are very generous to guests. In almost every house I visited, no matter how tiny it was or how economically-marginalized its members are, I was invited to lunch. Older women, in particular, insisted on having me over for lunch of meat and vegetables. I was often served Pepsi Cola and a generous amount of sweets, which I was

never able to finish. This is particularly interesting as I was not met with the same generosity in Zamalek.

The Story of Soha

Soha has been married for seven years, and moved to 'Ishash Kum Ghurab soon after she was married. "I was engaged for two months before marrying my husband, and before moving here, I lived in Fayoum, my hometown," she said. She added that her husband had initially gone to Fayoum to ask another woman for marriage, and when it didn't work out, he asked around for potential brides, and found her. They have three children, a five-year-old girl, a four-year-old boy and a five-month-old girl. She is a housewife and her husband works in construction. On a typical day, her husband leaves the house early in the morning to work, then she takes the children to the nursery, buys food to cook, and later in the day calls her husband to see if he will have dinner with them. "My husband comes back at night and sits with the children for a while before going to bed," she said. When asked about how power operates in her household, she responded:

The man's say is the one that goes, of course. A woman should always feel that her husband is the foundation of the household. She has to always feel that he is more powerful than her. It has to be this way. If she doesn't feel so, then there is something wrong. A woman needs to be obedient...when a woman obeys her husband, she feels that she is a woman who listens to her husband, and that he is a man who is able to make her do what he wants. That does not mean that he would ask her to clean his shoes, for example, and she would obey. It means that if he tells her to do something right, she must do it. A man has to be a man and a woman has to be a woman. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Similar to some of the respondents from Zamalek, Soha defines power in terms of the ability to make decisions and to influence the actions of others. She also attaches particular connotations to the gender binary; she attaches "obedience" to being a woman, and the ability to influence a woman's actions to "manliness." In the process of gender construction, particular meanings and behaviors are attached to the gender binary, which is apparent in Soha's narrative. Soha,

furthermore, points to that a system of gender division of labor exists in her household, and in her larger family:

A woman has her domain, and a man has his domain. For example my husband cannot just come to the house and ask me to clean, I have to do it when I think I need to. He can give comments but in a good way. A man should understand that his wife is tired all day cleaning after the kids and feeding them, so he should be appreciative. If he finds dirty dishes, he shouldn't make a big deal out of it. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Soha believes that each family member is assigned particular responsibilities depending on their gender, and she also believes that her opinions are of significant value to her household, and does not believe in absolute "obedience." According to her:

The man's say doesn't just go whether he is right or wrong. He has to consult with his wife, which is what my husband does with me. They should both consult each other on different matters. He is not the supreme commander in the house. What if what he thinks is wrong? In that case a woman should say that this is not right, and they should discuss it together. She should have a role and an opinion. I do not mean that she should force her opinions on him, but should push for the right thing. (Personal interview, April 2015).

While she began by stressing that the man has to have the final say, and has to be the more "powerful" in the household, she clarified that she has a significant role in how her household operates, and in the decision-making process within it. Furthermore, she elucidated that even though her husband is twenty years her senior, she does not feel the age difference. "I feel that I am more mature than he is in terms of way of thinking," she said. She further added:

The position I have in my marriage is very different than other women in my family. Me and my husband have agreed on certain rules in between us in the house, we cooperate, we don't hide things from each other, we make decisions together. My husband cannot take a step without telling me. That is not control, but it is mutual understanding. I have the freedom to leave the house and I don't have to tell him where I am going before I do. I am not like my sister or my sister-in-law who get beaten and insulted in their houses. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Not only does Soha play a significant role in the management of her household, but she had an active role in reaching an arrangement vis-à-vis the everyday mechanics of running the household

with her husband. She told me that her active role evolved over the past seven years as she and her husband slowly began gaining each other's trust, which points to how a process of negotiation and renegotiation of household rules and subject positions takes place within families. She further emphasized the importance of her opinions and the value of the advice she gives to her husband in how she saw her husband's relationship with his own family:

My husband used to think that his family cannot do anything without him, but I didn't think so. He used to tell me, "my brother and sister need me and cannot function without me," but I used to tell him that I don't think so. In fact, each of them only care about their own interests. As time went by, he started realizing that what I used to tell him is right. He began telling me, "You were right about what you told me." Things change. As his siblings began getting married, their care and love went to their own families and kids, and they started giving him less attention. Because they started having a greater responsibility, they are now more concerned about their households and children not my husband and their other siblings. By time, my husband started realizing that his house should come first, as I used to tell him. He used to tell me my sister cannot sit and eat without me, but I told him that no, she cares about her son, husband, and household more. (Personal interview, April 2015).

However, Soha and her husband attempt to "hide" the nature of their relationship in front of her husband's family, she told me, "in front of his family, I say yes to everything and do not argue with him. He also never asks me for what I want unless it is in private. He really likes to maintain this image in front of them, but things are very different in between us. We do this so that they don't think that I am in control." Soha's narrative about her husband's desire to maintain a particular image of "masculinity" resonates with some of the Zamalek narratives, particularly those of Mohamed and Sameh. To draw on Jackson and Balaji (2011, p. 22), masculinity is first and foremost a social construction that has led to the construction of notions of hierarchy and power. As mentioned earlier and according to Kandiyoti (1987), masculinity is a position that is not permanently present but that is gained, and can be lost at any instant (p. 387). Thus, some men are continuously concerned with the act of proving their masculinity and are frequently worried about

its possibility losing their masculine identity (p. 387). This is particularly visible in the case of Soha and her husband; while they have shared understanding regarding ways of running the house, and while Soha has significant power over what can be done and what cannot be done within their household, a particular image of a “powerful masculine” man has to be performed for the social audience, and this image has to be maintained.

Importantly, Soha, as earlier mentioned, is a housewife. She told me that she holds a high school degree and that, before marriage, she used to work as a sales-person in a clothes shop, a furniture store, and as a caregiver for an older woman. “After marriage, I stopped working as my husband’s family does not approve of women’s work and my husband never wanted me to. We just adjust ourselves to my husband’s income regardless of how much it is,” she clarified. It is worth pointing out that while her husband and his family are against her seeking paid work, she did not express interest in working outside the house. Furthermore, the modernist perspective that some of my Zamalek respondents have employed regarding how paid work adds to a woman’s perceived “power” was not reflected, in any way, in Soha’s narrative. Her narrative clearly shows that she has an active and powerful role in her household, and being a housewife adds to her power. She told me that her husband appreciates the work that she does in the house and with the children, which implies that her housework is highly valued as an activity.

But housework is not an easy task, and Soha’s responsibilities can at times be overwhelming. Soha emphasized that when she was recently married, she only had Nagat, their first child, so “[she] and [her] husband used to communicate better, and [they] used to go out a lot,” as she said. She further mentioned that after they had their second child, Abdelrazek, responsibilities began building up. “When we had Iman, our youngest daughter, we stopped even spending time together. So sometimes he would do something without asking me simply because

there is no time for us to sit together and discuss things,” Soha emphasized. She further told me that because of life pressures, there are times when they are both under a lot of tension at home. “I am constantly faced with psychological and physical pressures, particularly because the children are very young and I am fully responsible for taking care of them...I feed them, bathe them, put them to bed. I also take care of all nursery matters,” she told me. The two older children go to a nearby nursery and she fully takes care of their homework. “At first we used to all eat together, but now my husband would tell me to cook, and to eat with the children and he would eat when he comes back. Our marriage has completely changed,” she sadly narrated. But while Soha’s work as a housewife is not easy, and while she does not get much help, she continued to acknowledge her significant role in her household, the way in which her husband appreciates what she does, and how he treats her well. As she said:

Even though my husband’s family thought that whoever marries my husband would be humiliated, he has always treated me well. If we disagree or fight, we stop sleeping in the same bed. But nothing happens beyond that...we never offend or insult each other. My husband believes he should respect me so I would respect him in return, and he thinks a man should never beat his wife. This is a great thing which I like. He says he doesn’t understand how a man could beat his wife and then sleep with her...he wonders how she would even want to be with him after he beat her. All my sisters-in-law are constantly being beaten and insulted by their husbands. When they come to complain to me, they always tell me that I don’t get their situation because my husband is different. Because I didn’t go through the same problem, I cannot really help them. My husband never beat me nor did he ever humiliate me or my parents. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Furthermore, and contrary to what some of the Egypt literature on the household has indicated (e.g. the work of Taylor, 1984 and Brink, 1991), Soha’s mother-in-law does not have absolute power over her daughters-in-law, including Soha herself. Not only that, but Soha’s husband usually “sides with her” when conflict arises between her and his mother. According to Soha:

My mother-in-law sometimes tells my husband that I didn't visit her in the morning, so instead of fighting with me over that, he would tell her that I am tired working all day in the house. He is a good man, thank God. No matter how good the family house is, it is never a comfortable place to live. If my husband brings back some fruit, his mother would feel jealous. She thinks he should be putting her first as she raised him, and another woman cannot just come and steal him and his money. (Personal interview, April 2015).

It is worth observing the dynamics of power in Soha's household, particularly since she lives in a three-story building with her husband's family. The mother-in-law lives on the ground floor, her brother-in-law and his wife live on the first floor, and her family on the third floor. It seems that a form of power struggle takes place between Soha and her mother-in-law, particularly since they live in close proximity to each other. But the husband's tendency to "defend" Soha is an important mode through which her position within the household is enhanced vis-à-vis the mother-in-law. However, and according to Soha, her husband's family does not appreciate her significant position in her household. As she explained:

His family does not like that I have a say. By family I mean his mother and siblings, as his father passed away. All his siblings used to say that our marriage will not continue...they still say this till now. His siblings think I have total control over him, though I am not trying to control everything, I swear. But the reality is that my husband and I are able to communicate well and we understand each other, that is all. I never told him not to help his brothers or sister, I never told him to stop visiting them. I help him out when he wants to buy them something. I tell him when I think his mother does not have any money so he can pass by her and give her some cash. I also tell him to not make her feel that I told him to do so. (Personal interview, April 2015).

According to Soha, her mother-in-law has "no control over anything, but she picks fights for no reason." She explained that all the family would be all sitting with her, and she would suddenly start a fight. "She would, all of a sudden, insult us and kick us out of the house," she explained. Soha added:

Right before the "*subū*" (the celebration of a baby's birth) of my eldest daughter started, she suddenly started screaming, and told us to immediately stop what we are doing, and to turn off the music. I felt very bad, and had to come upstairs to my

house. My brother's siblings came and started telling me not to feel bad. She did that because when I had my eldest daughter, one of her grandchildren had recently passed away in an accident, and one of my brothers-in-law was in prison for theft. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Soha clarified that her mother-in-law feels that Soha "is responsible for the death of the grandchild" because he died in a car accident on his way back from her engagement party. She explained that "this is [her] weakness in the household." She said she wished she could enjoy the birth celebration as did not have a proper wedding party. She explained that on her wedding night, her husband picked her up from the hairdresser and they went straight to their house in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab without any form of celebration. "I wanted to dress nicely, put on makeup and just be happy. But the mother-in-law did not let me," she sadly said. It could perhaps be said that Soha's mother-in-law employs myth to exercise control over her family, like how she thinks that Soha is responsible for the car accident. But then again, and according to Soha herself, the mother-in-law has no power beyond "killing happy moments," as she put it. Soha told me that the person with the "greatest" power in the family "has to be a man," and thus, her oldest brother-in-law is the head of the family. "A girl in the family cannot get engaged without asking him first. My mother-in-law has no say because she is an old woman, so she doesn't know what is going on in the outside world," she explained. Soha added that even if the mother-in-law is against an engagement, the men in the family make the final decision if they know the potential suitor is a good man.

Soha further told me that she feels that she "was never able to live a happy moment even before she married her husband because [she] was engaged twice before meeting him and both engagements ended." It is worth looking at how her first engagement ended due to pressures from the man's sisters, as she told me. According to Soha:

His sisters didn't even know me, yet they didn't want him to marry me. He wanted to marry me but they wanted him to marry a girl that they picked for him, so they pressured him to leave me. They told him they didn't like that I wore trousers, tight

and short clothes. They weren't even religious...the sister who had the biggest problem with the marriage owned a cabaret in Haram street. This woman wanted to control him so that he works with her. She wanted to keep him under her wing as he was the only unmarried man in the family. The clothes issue was just an attempt to make him leave me. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Soha's narrative further points to the modes of control which some women exercise over male family members. In the case of Soha's former fiancé, this extends beyond sons and husbands to siblings as well. "He was much better looking than me...he was very good-looking. He loved me from inside," she added. She further said that the pressure from his sisters, who are all married and have daughters of her age, was "too much." "But his mother was different," Soha noted. "She would buy me a box of mangoes and carry it up the stairs herself even though she was an aging woman. She used to tell me I have to let you taste whatever I am eating. Up until she passed away two months ago, I regularly visited her," she added.

Regarding her parents' household, Soha described it as "unstable." She explained that her father was married to another woman while he was married to her mother, and that her parents recently divorced. "They were married for twenty-five years, and only divorced seven years ago...twenty-five years is like a life sentence," she said sarcastically. She told me that in her parents' house, her mother was "the most important" as she took care of her five sisters and two brothers. As she explained, "She came first as she did everything for us. My mother married us all, not my father. She cared about us more than anything else, more than her own siblings. She did ask about them but my siblings and I came first. She also had no one to help her out." She told me that she felt that this is how it should be in her own household, and added that:

A man should put his household first, he should never be irresponsible towards it. With my parents, my mother did not make my father feel that he has any kind of responsibility towards the household, and that is why he turned out the way he did. Regardless of whether or not he works, he would come back to find his meals ready for him. He used to have a paid job, but sometimes he would not give my mother any money. Most of the time he used to give my mother one third of his money,

and spend two thirds on his own. When the washing machine or fridge broke down, she would fix them herself. She did everything herself, so he began not to care about the house as he thought that we are surviving on our own anyway regardless of what he is doing. So when a woman makes her husband feel like he is fully responsible for the house, he will not be able to think of anything else but his house. My mother did not work outside the house, so my uncles and grandmother used to help her financially. My grandmother from my father's side also used to help us....she was a very good woman and made sure we did not need anything. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Soha's narrative regarding how her parents' household functioned reveals how she actively challenged, and refused to reproduce, the way in which power operated in their household. She made sure that in her new household, things would operate differently and in accordance to what she saw as "the right thing." "In my parents' house, my father never respected my mother so when I got married, the first thing I asked my husband for is mutual respect," she told me. Her story provides insight about how individuals resist gendered power arrangements. Importantly, and drawing on Deutsch (2007), despite how structural constraints continue to construct gender inequalities, these are arbitrated by means of social interaction which hold the possibility for resistance at all times.

Soha's mother continues to play a role in her life, even after she was married. She told me that her mother visits a lot, and buys Ramadan lamps for the children despite her harsh financial situation. "She bakes bread and brings it to me and she brings me supplies when I give birth," she told me. She added that her husband's family wonders why her mother brings all of this, but "this is how it is in our family," she said. However, Soha clarified that her mother does not interfere with her household issues in any way. "I do not tell her my problems with my husband. If I do, she would hate him and I don't want this to happen," she explained. She added that at the end of the day she is her daughter so she would take her side regardless of whether she is right or wrong. Soha said she knows a young woman from the neighborhood who is about to get divorced, even

though she's been married for less than a year. According to Soha, the reason for the divorce is that her mother is in total control of her father, and so she wants to do the same with her husband. "Her mother tells her not to let her husband take control of anything, and she tells her that if he does anything that she does not like, she should not accept...she screams and insults him," she explained. Thus, Soha actively tries not to involve her mother in her household affairs.

As earlier mentioned, Soha has three young children, two daughters and a son. She told me that unlike other children in the area, she never lets her children out on the street. "I had them go down to the street for a while, but they started picking up swear words and bad behavior... the boy began picking up swear words, street language, and started talking like a "*baltagy*" (thug), she told me. She added that she is trying to keep him from playing in the street, and she is making sure he goes to the nursery. "I give him incentives, like buying him something or taking him out, to go to the nursery," she explained. She added that she wishes she could move to another area for the sake of her children:

My greatest wish in life is to move from this area because the environment contributes to my children's behavior. I even told my husband that we can go work as janitors in any building. We sit here in the house and we can listen to all what's going on the street, including street language. If we move away from here I can have more control over my children. (Personal interview, April 2015).

But the street is not the only restricted area for Soha's children, their grandmother's flat is restricted as well:

I don't let them stay at their grandmother's for long...they go check on her and come back right away. The doors of the apartment downstairs are open all day and night, so children can easily go in and out of the house, and they will eventually pick up swear words. Also my mother in law is an old woman, she gets mad easily, and she ends up shouting at the children. My eldest daughter used to go to her grandmother's a lot, and she used to tell her not to sit with me, and to only sit with her. I feared that she would turn my daughter against me, that she would tell her negative things about me. My daughter then started to tell me, "Why don't you let me sit with my grandmother?" I feared that my mother-in-law would negatively

affect her, so I started to not let her go there a lot. This actually happened with my sister-in-law's daughter...she grew up to not like her own mother because she used to sit with her grandmother for long periods. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Again, Soha's narrative about how she controls the amount of time the children spend at her mother-in-law's house reflects her elevated position and power in her household. Furthermore, the narrative sheds more light on the power struggle between Soha and her mother-in-law. She spoke about this particular issue further and told me that her eldest daughter used to overhear her mother-in-law "insulting" her behind her back, so she would tell her, and Soha would get upset. Soha further explained that apart from her mother-in-law's "unacceptable" behavior, she did not find her daughter's participation in women's gossip appropriate:

I felt that she is starting to get into the habit of telling family members about what others are saying about them. So I had a talk with her about how this is not appropriate behavior. I told her to never ever participate in this "Harem" gossip thing. Now I no longer allow her to sit with me when I am with my sisters-in-law and other women in the family. I taught her that it is inappropriate for girls to sit with the Harem. I also don't want her mentality to change...she is just a kid. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Ironically, when we I was sitting with Soha, her daughter overheard our talk and went to her grandmother telling her that we are discussing marriage and children. Furthermore, and importantly, women's private arenas and the forms of gossip that take place within those arenas described by Soha have been discussed by Abu-Lughod (1990). In her study of Bedouin women, she explains that women's private communities are important sites through which resistance is exercised (p. 43). She argues that within those circles, women employ "silences" and "secrets" to their own gains and conceal certain information from the men (p. 43). She consequently argues that the aforementioned modes of resistance point to that the gender power structure exercises control over women by means of multiple limitations and boundaries, and that women support those limitations, in their acceptance of gender-segregated systems, while simultaneously

resisting, through guarding the sacredness of their private arena where they exercise resistance (p. 43).

It is also worth noting how what Soha feared for each of her children is very different based on their gender; while she feared that her son would acquire “street” language, she was worried that her daughter would participate in “harem gossip.” This is an example of gendering takes place in the family from a very young age. Regarding how Soha raises her children, she told me:

I don’t differentiate between the boy and the girls, they all have to be raised properly and get a good education. The only difference is that it is inappropriate for girls to do certain things. A boy can go out on the street, but a girl can’t. Ever since the revolution, the country has become much more insecure and we fear more for our daughter’s security. We even installed a lock on the door, even though it is a closed community here. A boy is allowed to urinate on the street but a girl can’t. A girl cannot talk to a boy on the street. If she learns that those things are inappropriate, she will not do them. In the house I do not differentiate between what each of them gets, but the girl can help me out with house chores unless I need more help then I ask the boy as well. (Personal interview, April 2015).

Aside from that Soha disciplines her children differently and assigns them chores based on their gender, she told me that a girl’s mindset is by nature different than that of a boy, “she is weak and shy by nature, unlike a boy who wants to be strong and has a big ego,” she said. She added:

My daughter never leaves the bathroom before putting on her shorts. When I bathe her and bring her to the bedroom to dress her, she asks her brother to close his eyes. She was a bit like that by nature, and I worked on developing that nature. There are girls here in the area who would go on the street without trousers and the parents do not care. (Personal interview, April 2015).

There is a slight paradox in Soha’s narrative; while she points to that gender, with the connotations attached to it, is “natural” and eternal, she does say that there are other girls in the area who are not as shy as her daughter. Furthermore, she explained to me that the reason why the girl helps her out around the house is not only because she is a girl, but because “she is smarter and more mature than her brother,” as she said. “My son is not as smart. The girl understands me more...she would

never take money from anyone except for me and her father as I told her, but the boy can still accept money from people no matter how many times I tell him not to,” she explained.

The Story of Azza

Azza married her first husband when she was seventeen years old, and she is now thirty seven. “I’ve been through many phases in my life...I never had luck in any of my marriages. I got married and divorced three times,” she narrated. After her last divorce, she moved back with her mother, where she raised her two daughters. She told me that her mother was financially supporting her and her children, as well as her younger sister until she was married off, all from Azza’s grandfather’s pension who was a government employee. Azza told me that her first husband was her cousin from her mother’s side, and that they got divorced because they “were having children with abnormalities as [they] are related.” About her first husband, she narrated:

I only lived with my first husband for four years. I feel that I did my best in this marriage...I tried to support him and appreciate him as much as I could, but he wanted to marry another woman to have sons. The problem is that the genetic abnormality happened only with boys, not with girls, that is why my daughter is healthy. The two boys I had with him were disfigured and passed away soon after their birth. He felt that we are torturing ourselves and the children that we have. He was not satisfied with God’s will. I was satisfied with the girl and wanted to raise her with him, but he said he wanted a boy. When he wanted to remarry, I refused to stay in the marriage, so I asked for a divorce. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

The way in which Azza refused to stay in her marriage after her husband decided to marry a second wife is indicative of how women exercise forms of resistance in their marriages, and in their families. In fact, through looking at how acts of resistance have influenced Azza and her family, it might be possible to pinpoint how those acts can transform dominant gender ideologies (Deutsch, 2007, p. 120). The impact of Azza’s acts of resistance on her very subjectivity can be observed throughout the rest of her story.

To go back to her narrative about her first husband, Azza told me that he “was a good man, he took full responsibility of the house.” He was a “family man” and a “good husband.” She told me that throughout the course of the marriage, he was “the one with the upper hand.” She added that she did not have any role outside the management of the household. Azza, throughout her narrative about her first husband, attempted to reaffirm that he had the absolute “power” and that she was never able to exercise any form of resistance. Similar to the narrative of Huda who lives in Zamalek, Azza did not view her opposition to her husband’s second marriage as a form of resistance. She further told me that “the man does not consult the woman with anything...If he wants to take her opinion, then fine.” But she also told me that when her first husband was building a new house while they were married, he used to ask her how she would like the house to be built, and how she would like to decorate it. However, she clarified that that was the only thing he consulted with her on. “But I did not mind that he took most decisions without asking me first because he got me used to that, and I was only seventeen back then,” she said. She further told me:

He used to tell me, “You don’t have to ask me why I am doing this and that.” At first I used to try to discuss things with him, but he told me to not ask why he is doing certain things, so he got me used to not interfering with his decisions. When a woman nags too much, it creates problems between married couples...I notice this in my sister’s marriage. She keeps calling him every time he leaves the house to ask him where he is and what he is doing, and this annoys men. He does not want all his moves to be known. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

She then paused and added that “if there is trust, he will automatically come back and tell his wife about his day.” She said that when she stopped asking her husband “too many questions,” he began telling her about what happens with him on his own, whenever he has time and feels relaxed. “When a woman nags too much and gets jealous easily, a man gets more stubborn as he feels suffocated,” she said. It is important to not overlook Azza’s decision to adopt a particular strategy in her marriage in order for her husband to be less secretive about his affairs. Her story also reveals

some of the characteristics that individuals have attached to the gender binary, and that have become normalized, including men being “stubborn” and women being “jealous” and “nagging.” This is a consequence of a complex process of gender reproduction that “can be traced to gender as a frame,” as Risman et al. (2012, p. 9) put it. This is a mode through which individuals are subconsciously classified, and consequently, a reaction is produced depending on the meanings tied to this particular classification (p. 9). Furthermore, the gender-framing view postulates that the ideas that are subconsciously held about gender are used to produce and uphold “interactional expectations” of other people (p. 9). Furthermore, and as I have previously illustrated through the work of Goffman (1976) and Butler (1988), masculinity and femininity, and the meanings and stereotypes attached to them, are viewed as models of normative expression that can be momentarily acted out in social interaction and that “strike at the most basic characterization of the individual” (Goffman, 1975, p. 75). By means of acting out particular acts, people convey those expressions (p. 75).

The way in which power operates in Azza’s family, and throughout the course of her first marriage, also emerged when she discussed the role of her mother-in-law in the marriage. “My first husband was very close to his mother who interfered a lot in all decisions that were made about the household, and they consulted with each other on most matters. She was also my aunt, not a stranger, which gave her more power,” she said. Contrary to the narrative of Soha, and that of a few others in Zamalek, Azza’s mother-in-law had an active role in the household, and had an influence on Azza and her husband. She further explained that in her first marriage, her mother-in-law and mother, who are sisters, “were acting like real in-laws, meaning that they were very harsh and interfering.” She told me that her mother was very powerful but kind. Regarding her mother-in-law, she narrated:

My mother-in-law, who is also my aunt, raised me with my mother, and she picked me for her son. I took care of her when she was sick, and when her son was working abroad before he married me, that is why she liked me. But when I married her son and tensions started surfacing, things became different. We both began complaining about each other to my husband. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

She added that her mother and her mother-in-law interfered at first to guide her and her husband on what their marital responsibilities are, but later on, “we both knew what our responsibilities are so they did not interfere in that anymore,” she said. She explained that all family members had to listen to them and obey their orders because they were “the older mothers in the house.” This, again, is indicative of the power that her mother-in-law and mother had being the eldest figures in the family after their husbands passed away. The case, however, is different in Soha’s family who made it very clear that her mother and mother-in-law do not interfere in her family in any way, which reveals how positions of power largely vary among individual households. It is also worth mentioning that similar to Soha, Azza lives in the family house. There, her mother and mother-in-law lived with other aunts and uncles. “This is the house I am still living in now. When a member of the family gets married, they would live in a separate room in the house,” Azza explained.

Azza narrated that after her first divorce, she decided not to remarry, and to focus on raising her daughter from her first husband, but that her siblings and parents “pressured” her into getting remarried. “They said that I was too young to not remarry, so they married me off to another cousin, but from my father’s side this time. I was only twenty-one back then,” she said. Once again, Azza’s story sheds some light on how familial power relations operate. According to her story, her parents and siblings had a powerful position in the family that enabled them to influence her to remarry, even though she did not want to. But the marriage did not last for long. She told me that they divorced shortly after as they began having problems. She explained that she was only married to her second husband for three months, but that she only found out after divorce that

she was pregnant with her second daughter. She told me that her second marriage did not last as her husband was “spoiled”:

My second husband was the youngest of his siblings, so he was a bit spoiled. He did not handle responsibility or support us financially, and used to borrow money from his parents. And when we married we lived in the family house, so they were responsible for all expenses. I couldn't handle this situation. He was very irresponsible. I did not feel he is performing his role, and so we fought a lot, and ended up separating. I got married to feel more comfortable, not handle more worries and responsibilities. I said to myself that it would be better to live with my mother. Also my daughter from my first husband was living with my mother, so I wanted to live with her. I felt that my daughter and my mother need me more. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Azza's story points to that the financial responsibility is normatively assumed to be that of the man, and hence, the pressure this dominant belief places on men cannot be ignored. In fact, in the case of Azza, when the husband was not fulfilling the “financial role,” Azza took the action of ending her marriage, which sheds light on how failure to comply with dominant discourses of gender is often met with disapproval, and at times, absolute rejection. This, in turn, helps reproduce dominant gender ideology along with the various connotations attached to it.

Azza told me that there are many times that she feels overburdened and tired, and that life's pressures and responsibilities are sometimes more than she can handle. She paused and added that she feels very tired because she is alone, to the extent that she thought of remarrying for a third time...“not because of loneliness or the need of help in raising the children, but because I needed someone to help me carry the responsibility, and help me out financially,” she said. In fact, Azza did marry for a third time, but she regrettably mentioned that it did not work out as well. As she explained:

My luck is very bad in marriage. I was only married for ten days this time, and then we got divorced. The problem was that he was already married, and did not tell his wife that he was going to marry a second wife, so she did not accept it in any way, and made his life a living hell. She made him choose between me, and her and the

children, so he had to leave me. But this is something that I rarely mention because I feel that it does not count as a marriage. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Similar to how Azza was completely opposed to her first husband marrying a second wife, her third husband's wife absolutely rejected the idea of her husband marrying another woman, which reflects how women actively resist particular actions in their marriages that they do not approve of. Azza then added that after her third divorce, even though she gets tired sometimes, she tries to remain "strong." "That is my destiny. Because I do not have any luck in marriage, I try to tell myself that this is the way it is and I should accept it," she said. She added that she also reminds herself that men have needs:

When I am alone as the head of the household, I can manage my day-to-day needs of food and house supplies. But a husband will demand that his needs are met, there has to be expensive cooked meals, which will mean that the budget will be even tighter. Men say that they are tired from work and so they need maintenance. My husbands used to throw the little cash designated for household expenses and leave me to do the budgeting myself. Women are better at managing the household no matter how little the available resources are. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

From a Marxist point of view, it can be said that Azza's previous husbands, as labor, require to be fed, sheltered, and supplied with other subsistence indispensables to be able to produce (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2010). But the view that her previous husbands require cooked meals because they are "tired from work" overlooks how housework is also a form of active labor, and thus, the view assigns a lesser value on housework as opposed to paid work. Furthermore, similar to Soha, she saw herself as clever in household management and money allocation especially when comparing herself to the men she was married to. This demonstrates how some women view themselves as better at managing the economy of the household, even when they generally think of the male-figures in the household as the more "powerful."

Azza's father passed away thirty-five years ago. She told me her mother was very kind and supportive to her and to her two sisters and three brothers. I saw tears in her eyes as she spoke

about her mother, who passed away from breast cancer five years ago after it spread to other organs. “She never made us feel that we need anything. I knew her worth after she passed away. She never made any of us work, not before or after marriage or divorce,” she said. She also mentioned that her brothers financially supported her and her sisters before they got married. “But after each of us got married, we moved to our husband’s houses and they stopped asking about us or helping us financially,” she said. She added that since her mother passed away, she has been supporting her family from the pension she receives from the ministry of social affairs for divorced women. “I try as much as I can to support the house from the pension money especially since I was never able to work outside the house because I have high blood pressure. I tried once to work at a clothes factory but I got very tired and could not handle the job,” she explained. Importantly, her mother’s powerful position was not only evident in her financial role, but also in the way she controlled the household as Azza grew up with her siblings, and in the way she imposed rules on the girls in particular:

In my mother’s house, there were stricter rules enforced on the girls than the boys. She came with us everywhere we went. She made sure we did not visit other people. She made sure we were closed off from the outside world, and that we only interacted within the boundaries of the family. Our only role outside our direct family was to congratulate our extended family on occasions such as weddings, births, and birthdays, but that was it. With the girls, she generally raised us to know what we should do and what we shouldn’t do. With the boys, they became independent from her at a certain age unlike us. My older brother got a job at a young age after my father passed away. At the age of sixteen, he was already a man, and started taking on responsibility. He raised himself to be a man. Same goes for my other brothers....because my father was deceased, they wanted to become men early on, and they did not live a period of adolescence. They got a job from the age of twelve. Thus they were all able to handle responsibility, in their houses and before marrying. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

The narrative of Azza demonstrates how some parents may choose to impose different rules on the children based on their gender. The discourse of security that was frequently brought up by my Zamalek interlocutors, and by Soha, is implied in Azza’s narrative about how the girls were locked

in for the most part. Furthermore, the way in which Azza's mother brought the girls up to "know what [they] should do and what [they] shouldn't do" points to how parents attempt to reproduce gender within the family, regardless of whether or not the children choose to follow gender norms taught and communicated by the parents. Finally, the boys were taught their "responsibility" to get a paid job and bring in money to the household at an early age which demonstrates how the ideology that ties "manhood" to the financial role is often communicated to children in childhood, sometimes resulting in its reproduction. That being said, Azza mentioned that her second husband did not assume the financial role, and that her brothers have given it up as well (towards her not their families), which shows how gender ideology is not mechanically reproduced, but that it is fluid, changing, and continually challenged.

With her daughters, Azza said that she raises them in the same way that her mother raised her and her sisters. As she told me:

I feel that the story is repeating itself with my daughters....I raise them in the same way that I was raised. Nothing has changed...norms and traditions are very important to us. I see outside of our house girls who are raised very openly, and who wear inappropriate and unusual clothing. But we raise our children like we were raised. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Azza's narrative about choosing to reproduce her parents' (mother's, in this case) discourse of gender heavily resonates with that of Salma, the twenty-nine-year-old woman from Zamalek. Once again, it cannot be assumed that both of those women do so uncritically; the narratives of both women reveal that they are convinced with the discourses of their parents and that is why they made a decision to reproduce those discourses. Further, Azza emphasized the importance of clothing to the discourse of gender. She told me that she and the father of her elder daughter have imposed very strict rules on what the girl can wear. This is an important matter in their household "because her father is a bit religious, so he is controlling in that matter," she said. "He has a big

role in raising her, his house is very close to us, and so she spends a lot of time there. I am thankful that he has a role in raising her...he controls what she wears, constantly makes sure he knows where she is, calls her to make sure she is done with school,” she told me. Nevertheless, she seemed disappointed as she told me that her second husband has no role in her younger daughter’s life whatsoever. She also explained that because she is still young, only twelve years old, she tries not to impose too many restrictions on her; “she still goes out to play with her friends,” she said. Interestingly, however, Azza explained that her niece is also twelve years old but because “her body is starting to fully develop,” her mother began imposing strict restrictions on her. “From the age of twelve till sixteen, big changes happen to a girl’s body...it develops and gets rounder,” she said. Here, body politics intersect with the issue security and fear that as a girl’s body develops, she is more likely to be harassed or even raped. As Juschka (2009) argues, the “female body” is a reflection of the “social body”; the control and regulation of the female body is both a depiction and a reflection of the control of the social body in Egypt at a particular moment.

Furthermore and according to Azza, even though her second husband is “religious,” the reason why she wants her daughters to dress modestly is not a religious thing; “we have our customs and traditions that tell us to do,” she said. She clarified that she has been wearing the veil since middle school and that this is something important in her family that she has inherited. To draw on Lorber (1994, p. 58), dominant discourses of gender, including gendered clothing, are normalized through the employment of religion and through cultural constructions, nevertheless those discourses are most potently reproduced by means of rendering this process invisible and making the idea of change unthinkable. But the theme of security and fear heavily influences the family’s embracement of modest dress. “We are not an overly religious family, but modest dress has become even more important these days as we fear more for our daughters safety,” she

explained. She told me that her sister stresses on that issue with her daughter; “because she looks much older than her age, she hides her,” she reiterated. Furthermore, Azza told me that in their area, which she described as “*sha’by*,” families know each other, which makes safety less of an issue. However, she said that she fears the outside world, especially in *Eid*:

In *Eid* we leave the girls to go out with their girlfriends in the area, but outside its boundaries we don’t let them go alone. And as the girl gets older, she needs to be more disciplined when it comes to where she is allowed to go. I feel that the metro is safer, so she takes it sometimes, and if she wants to go to the afterschool class, she has to go with her colleagues which is safer than if she goes on her own (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Regarding the younger daughter, Azza further narrated:

At school, I have to know all her friends, and try to make sure she tells me about all that happens there. I try to interfere in every aspect of her life, and she does not hide anything from me. But I trust her, to be honest, so I try not to impose too many restrictions on her. If I can’t go to school to ask about her, I trust what she tells me. She does very well at school and wants to be an engineer. I want her to become an engineer, but she is free to do whatever she wants when she gets married. I do not think I will interfere with something like that...it will be up to her and her husband. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Despite Azza’s contention that she actively chose to reproduce her mother’s gender ideology of imposing very strict restrictions on girls, her narrative regarding her younger daughter illustrates that, once again, those ideologies are not fixed, and that they change and transform in day-to-day interaction. Because Azza believes she can trust her daughter, she does not feel the need to be over-protective of her. Importantly, her narrative, similar to that of Sameh’s, points to that some parents’ attempts to impose restrictions on their daughters ceases after marriage, a phase in which the couple is left to decide for themselves. This, however, is a highly subjective matter which varies among, and within, individual families.

Before our interview came to an end, Azza told me that she believes the family needs a father, a husband, and a man in the house because a woman cannot do it all on her own. But she

then paused and said, “Thankfully I have been living for twelve years without a man, and I am able to perform the role of the man and the woman.” She said that she feels that she was affected by her mother who lived as a widow for thirty-five years, and raised them “in the best way possible.” “I cannot deny that the man has an important role, but life sometimes forces us to live without a man,” she told me. Thus, it can be said that individuals are often forced to challenge dominant beliefs of gender as they are met with unexpected scenarios in life. Azza’s three divorces have resulted in the feminization of her household, despite her resistance to being its head, primarily because of her desire to marry a man who would help her with the financial responsibility, as she clarified.

The Story of Sayyed

Sayyed is a seventy-eight-year-old man who used to work as a house painter. His father was from Upper Egypt, but he has never been there. He told me that his father moved to Alexandria where Sayyed was born and opened a bakery but that when the Second World War took place, “everyone began running away from danger.” His parents ran away to Cairo with the children, and kept on looking for a place to live, and they finally settled in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, “I’ve been living here since Hitler’s war,” he said. By “Hitler’s war” he refers to WWII. He is married with five children, and two of his daughters and two of his sons are married. He has been married to his wife for forty-five years. In all those years, “I haven’t sent her to her parent’s house, not even for once,” he told me. Sayyed’s treatment to his wife is problematic. As he told me:

I am responsible for spending and maintenance of the household, and my wife has to be obedient. She has to say yes to whatever I say. She cannot say no. If I want to have sex, she cannot refuse. If my wife opposes what I say, I beat her up and insult her. When we used to fight, and she disappointed me, her father would come to our house and beat her up. When I was still young and she was pregnant, I would come back home to find her very tired and sleeping. Back then I had no idea that pregnancy does that to women. When I used to find her in this state, I would go

complain to her father and tell him “I don’t want your daughter, come and take her.” He would sit with me and would calmly ask me what is wrong. He always took my side. Nowadays this never happens with married couples....life has changed (Personal Interview, April 2015).

A couple of aspects are worth underscoring in Sayyed’s account. First, his understanding of gender power relations is heavily founded on the maintenance-obedience formula. That is, he believes that his wife must be obedient because he provides for her, which no doubt implies that housework and activities related to motherhood are extremely undervalued. In Sayyed’s perspective, the marriage contract obliges women to be obedient to their husbands and in return, women are granted their husbands’ protection, who are also responsible for the maintenance of the household, their wives, and children (Al-Sharmani, 2010). Importantly, men’s role of supporting the household is earned through their right to their wives’ “sexual and reproductive labor,” as Al-Sharmani puts it (p. 11). Second, to draw on Dobash and Dobash (1998), some men, like Sayyed, might resort to violence as a mechanism of punishment toward their wives or partners who do not fulfil their “sexual, “physical,” or “emotional” desires. Furthermore, to draw on Hearn (1998, p. 37), some men employ violence in order to prove their “manliness.” Drawing on Anderson and Umberson (2001, p. 359), violence, and the capacity to exercise power over a female partner as a consequence of this violence, is a site through which the masculine identity is constructed. Importantly, Anderson and Umberson (2001, p. 359) draw on Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity to argue that men who perform acts of violence imply the “instability of masculine subjectivity” as the identity of the masculine is only present in the form of actions that individuals perform in compliance with a dominant ideology of gender. Gender performances render the nature of masculine power and superiority as a social-construction invisible, and make it seem as “natural” and ever-present (p. 359).

Even though I gave no reaction to Sayyed's words, as my job was to solely listen to his story and not to state my opinion or make judgments, he somehow knew that I would find his words problematic, so he paused and told me that women in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab are uneducated, "and even when a woman is educated, she is uncivilized," he said. He added that:

A woman here doesn't think for herself, and does not go out to experience different things...the only thing she has is that she was born in a particular environment, gets married, doesn't really have a desire regarding who to marry, when she is told to marry this person, she just agrees. The father decides who she is to marry. And the lack of education and understanding in our area means that manhood is simply the ability to decide for women, who are seen to have no character and no ability to distinguish between good and bad. This is the nature of our area. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

It is worth looking at Sayyed's narrative while keeping in mind the narratives of the women I spoke with in Masr Al-Qadima, including Soha and Azza whom I introduced already, and others whom I will be introducing shortly. The majority of those narratives, though very different, point to the ways in which women actively reshape their subjectivities, and exercise various forms of power and resistance. Even though Soha and Azza come from a younger generation, Azza spoke of her mother's and mother-in-law's active roles in her household. I will also be introducing shortly the story of Umm Emad, a woman of Sayyed's age who holds a powerful position in her family. Thus, while Sayyed's narrative may be true in the case of his household, we cannot view all women from the neighborhood within this narrative of passivity. Furthermore, Sayyed's view of how manhood is constructed in the area is thought-provoking and points to how he had carefully examined and questioned the idea of manhood; he believes that because men are mostly uneducated in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab they understand manhood as the ability to exercise power over the women. He told me that he himself is uneducated and that is why he holds those beliefs about familial power, which provides insight about how some men from the area view their own-

selves. It is also worth noting how he described women in the area as “uncivilized,” an indication of how women from lower-income communities have been constructed vis-à-vis women from higher income communities. In addition, because he worked as a house painter in high-income houses all his life, he told me he frequently interacted with families from Zamalek and Mohandessin, and he described the way in which gender is performed in those households as different from how it is performed in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab. According to Sayyed:

In other richer areas, people are educated and civilized, and people are educated from a very young age. They also live a very comfortable and privileged life. Women there do whatever they want. They go out and they see different things. Some of them travel to America and Europe and come back to apply what they have seen there. I have seen this myself. I’ve seen a lot...the man’s word is only related to his ability to spend. I am a house painter, so I went to a lot of houses in those areas, and dealt with many people. From what I saw, in Zamalek women are more respected than here. Men there only spend...they agree to whatever women ask for. Among Zamalek families, I’ve seen many women who are in control of their husbands...they are beautiful, come from big families, and are educated. I was working in one of the apartments in the building of La Paire in Zamalek, and the man used to beg his wife to come and sit with him, and she would tell him that she is working. She was the man, she controlled him, the children, and the maids. He was no more than a source of money...a wallet. The house is the kingdom of the woman in Zamalek, but here even house-related issues are not fully managed by the woman. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

Sayyed’s view that as women become more educated, and as their family’s social status increases, they gain power in their households, and become the “men,” implies his realization of the fluidity of the masculine identity and that it is something individuals try to “attain.” It also carries the implication that education and family position increases a woman’s power. Furthermore, his comparison of gender relations in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab and Zamalek is interesting as it provides insight about how the element of class in relation to gender and workings of power is viewed. But he told me that there are jobs that women cannot do, only men can, and that there are things that women from the upper-classes cannot do. He said:

Would you get a woman from Mohandessin and let her wash clothes, or carry something over her head? No. Some women here in the area come all the way carrying groceries over their heads, and come back exhausted, in order to save the one-pound bus ticket. But if she was from a rich neighborhood, someone would carry her things for her, and a taxi or driver her will take her anywhere she wants to go...money makes a difference. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

Sayyed further pointed out that some women in the area work hard to help their husbands and feed their children. He told me that a woman once went to his wife and told her to work at the Kasr Al-Ainy hospital, and she told her it is not something to be ashamed of, “you are helping your husband,” the woman said. Sayyed told me that even though his wife did not go to work there as they did not need the money back then, it is fine if she wants to work to help out her husband. He added:

She has to come and ask me first, if I agree then she goes, and if I don’t then she has to stay and not say a word. I know some younger women who are educated so they insist on working, and because they work, they become equals, and they become like a man. After Nasser came to power and the industrialization started, women began to work like men, and as long as she works and the man stays in the house, you cannot ask her what she is doing. This happens a lot in the area. They work in hospitals as nurses or in admin jobs, or as government employees, and the men sit and do nothing as they can’t find work, and she fulfills the needs of the house and children. Some of them even know that their wives work but they don’t ask what they do. How can I then open my mouth with a woman like that? (Personal Interview, April 2015).

Once again, Sayyed’s words implied a particular desire to reaffirm his “masculine” identity that he associates with being the one in control. He compares himself with other men in the area whom he deems as not real “men” and as less powerful. But he again implied that paid work elevates the position of a woman, a view similar to that of Sameh from Zamalek. Sayyed, thus, did not view women’s paid work favorably as he believes that a woman who works outside the house will be hard to “control.” This further reveals how paid work is much more valued than housework.

Despite Sayyed’s seeming desire to maintain the image of the absolute “masculine” when he spoke of his wife, he did not do the same when he spoke of his children, particularly his sons.

He told me that even though he grew up with the eldest male in the family making all decisions, who was his grandfather, his “say is not as important as it was before” when it comes to his children. “When I tell my son to marry his daughter to a particular person, he tells me that is his business, that this is his daughter, and that he is free to marry her to whomever he sees fit,” he told me. He added that when he was young, things were different; he recalled that a man could be married with kids, and yet does not dare to smoke in front of his father. “When I was young, if a boy does something wrong, a father would slap him on his face and restrain his arms,” he added. He told me that nowadays this has changed, and that kids these days are exhausting to their parents. “My kids don’t listen to me. We sent our sons to school but they didn’t learn anything. Something is very wrong,” he explained. He also explained that his sons in no way follow him in the way that he deals with his wife; “it doesn’t even occur to him to try and be like me,” he said. “My older son does not know how to deal with his wife or with anyone, all he knows is that when he wants something, he should have it, from me, his wife, or his mother. When he grows up maybe he will learn something from us,” he regrettably added. This is also interesting as it points to that Sayyed views his treatment of his wife favorably. Importantly, while Sayyed resorted to violence as a mechanism of exercising power over his children when they were younger, his children did not turn out as obedient as he had hoped, which shows that his sons have been resistant to his attempts at exercising power. But he said that it is different with his daughters. “When my daughters don’t listen to me, I become aggressive, so they start listening to me,” he said. He added that he frequently tells his daughters that he had much more experiences than them, and so they begin listening to him. He added:

Girls here in the area respect their fathers and brothers. I haven’t seen any men in the area who follow their wives, or whose wives say no to them, or girls who don’t respect their fathers...and any girl who would do that would be ill-mannered...what

kind of man would accept humiliation from his daughter or wife? (Personal Interview, April 2015).

In Sayyed's narrative, when resistance and opposition comes from the sons, it is more accepted than when it comes from the daughters. This is closely related to the construction of masculinity and femininity; that a woman who disobeys a man, whether a father or a husband, is a threat to man's "masculine" identity which he strives to maintain. It is worth noting how he described disobedience from a wife or a daughter as "humiliation" as opposed to disobedience from a son, which he did not label as so.

Sayyed further pointed to the gendering process that takes place with the children in his narrative about how he raised his children. He told me that from a very young age, he used to take his sons with him to work, to the local coffee shop, to weddings; "I take them everywhere so they would experience different things," he said. He added that sometimes he used to take them to his friends' homes where they had beer, and the children would want to try the beer, but that he used to refuse to let them try it because it is "Haram." He added:

They ask me why I am drinking it. I tell them I was only drinking it socially because I am at my friend's house. I actually drink but I didn't want my children to turn out like me. Nowadays there is no such a thing. A young boy knows what he is doing and where he is going from early childhood...you cannot control them anymore. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

But while he used to take his sons with him to different places, he did not do the same with the daughters. And while he believes a father can no longer tell his son what to do and what not to do, he does not think this applies to the girls. Sayyed emphasized that a girl should not go out with a man so that her reputation is not damaged, and that she has a strict curfew. Boys, on the other hand, can come back whenever they want. He explained:

If you ask a boy where he was when he comes back, he'll just tell you that he was with his friends, and there is nothing that I can tell him. If a girl comes back late,

we ask her many questions about where she was and who she was with, and we don't let her out again. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

He also told me that a girl needs to always wear a “*gallabiyah*” (long dress with long sleeves), and should not show her behind. “Nowadays I see working women who wear trousers and put on makeup,” he said. Importantly, he emphasized the significance of “honor”; “honor is very important...I fear that people would talk about my daughter or wife and their reputation,” he said. Similar to many of the narratives put forward so far, monitoring a woman's sexuality and safeguarding her “honor,” which is seen to represent the honor of the family and the father, is evident in Sayyed's narrative. He emphasized his successful role in monitoring and safeguarding a woman's “honor”:

If a man ever comes and tells me your wife is doing something inappropriate, I can confidently respond that I know she is now cleaning the entrance of our house. I was married before to a woman who never went out of the house. When I first married her, I went to pick her up from the mosque. Nowadays with my grandkids, when a girl gets engaged, her fiancée wants to go out with her all the time. But if they don't end up getting married, the reputation of the girl and her father would be very badly affected. With my daughters, I used to have them sit with their fiancées here in our house in front of us, and tell them “you are not going out.” (Personal Interview, April 2015).

Sayyed added that he used to tell his daughters' fiancées that after they marry his daughters, he does not care “if they let them sleep on the street.” This points to how in Sayyed's view, the responsibility of guarding a woman's honor and sexuality becomes the responsibility of the husband after marriage. Paradoxically, though, he pointed out that his daughter remains an extension of his “honor” after marriage so when one of his son-in-laws was out of work, Sayyed was making good money at that time “so I had my wife give my daughter some money, who also doesn't work. I can't leave my son-in-law with no money if he has my daughter, my honor,” he explained.

But Sayyed believes that his mother raised his sisters “better” than how he and his wife raised their daughters. He said, “Our mother was very strict with my sisters. None of them was able to open her mouth in the presence of my mother. She was very strict, meaning that the girls were obliged to do as she says.” He nostalgically recalled the past, and told me that back then, there was obedience to the parents. He told me that despite how powerful his mother was, she took good care of his father, not like women nowadays:

Women used to make sure their husbands are properly fed...on Thursdays for instance, my mother used to cook meat, and she would feed the children, put them to sleep, and keep some food for my father. If we were still awake upon my father’s return, my father would want to give us some of his meat which disappointed my mother...she used to tell him that the children already ate and that he should not get them used to this. “Do not teach them greed,” she used to tell him, and then she would send us to bed in a room where we all slept...we were around twenty people sleeping together in that room. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

Sayyed emphasized that because his parents were very poor, they led their lives trying to survive, albeit whilst following a gender division of labor. His father took the role of the breadwinner, he tried to secure bread for the children, and the wife took care of the house and the children.

He used to come back with food in his *gallabiyah*, whether bread or sugar cane. Sometimes he came back with some money and meat. But all he did when he returned home was eat, pray and sleep. They used to do nothing....we are much comfortable than they were. He never knew what money is...nowadays I make much more money than he used to make. Thank God. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

The Story of Aly

“Do you see what I am doing now? I am milk-feeding my child. Is that something to be ashamed of? I don’t think so,” Aly told me when I first arrived to his living room while he was babysitting. He is a fifty-year-old man with three children working in construction. He told me that he is supposed to appear in front of me as a tough man and to not baby sit the children during the interview. “I should maintain my prestige in front of you...but I am not doing that, I am feeding

my little girl. When my wife is cooking or washing, why would I put more pressure on her? I should help her out,” he said proudly. Aly further clarified that he does not only help his wife with babysitting and feeding the children, but he values her input and opinions. He told me:

In my family, my say goes but I have to consult with my wife first. I take her opinion on some matters, and I don’t on others. For example, she has nothing to do with work-related issues, but when it comes to me partnering with somebody, or making a financial decision, I have to take her opinion first. If I have some extra money, I have to take her opinion regarding how I am going to spend it. When it comes to household decisions, it is her thing...if she wants to move furniture around, buy a new fridge or cooker, or buy a new television and satellite for the children. She once told me, “the children like to watch cartoon programs, and you want to watch the match, so why don’t we buy a new television and a receiver?”...I find that her opinions make sense so we do as she says. But if we disagree we go with what I say. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Aly told me that he is the one who has the final say upon disagreement with his wife because “this is the environment that she comes from...her father’s say matters more than her mother’s, and my background is the same...my father made all decisions.” But interestingly, his narrative resonates with those of Mohamed, Sameh, and Omar, the three men I spoke with in Zamalek, which shows that men attempt to hold an image of masculinity that is tied to being the primary decision-maker within the family. Aly further added, “But I am not old fashioned and traditional...I don’t play the role of the “*Sī-Elsayyed*”¹ He explained that if he comes back from work and doesn’t find a meal ready for him, he does not mind. “If I come back from work and find her washing and sweeping the floors, I take the children and take care of them. She asks me to help her out with the children and I do,” he explained. In fact, he told me:

My daughter was born with a closed rectum, so she couldn’t defecate. I had to come back from the coffee shop every day to help her defecate through a medical tool. Men on the coffee shop used to make fun of me when I left to go take care of that. They ask me if I changed her diaper, and they laugh at me. They also used to make

¹ *Sī-Elsayyed* is one of the most famous figures in Egyptian cinema and originally appeared in three Naguib Mahfouz novels. The figure of the *Sī-Elsayyed* embodied the character of a man who heavily exercised dominant masculine narratives inside his household while spending his nights in brothels and nightclubs.

fun of me when I went to prepare the food for my children when my wife was tired after she gave birth. On the coffee shop, men say that they are men and their wives should do as they say...one man says he wakes his wife up at two in the morning to make him tea. I don't do that. The people who don't just repeat what they see, which is that the man is the *Sī-ElSayyed*, and should be obeyed, are a few. This is a flawed understanding. The people who cooperate with their wives are a few. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Aly's narrative points to how some men actively contest the way in which gender and normative definitions of masculinity and femininity are constructed. Contrary to Sameh's narrative which explicitly emphasized the importance of maintaining a particular image of masculinity on the outside, Aly does not place much significance on whether he embodies the societal definition of the ideal "masculine." Aly did, however, attempt to emphasize his "masculine" identity when he spoke of who makes the final decision upon disagreement, as mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, Aly told me that women are responsible for many things; raising the children, taking care of the house, taking care of the husband, making sure their husband is comfortable, to comfort him and make his life better and to make him forget all the hard work of the day. "A man comes back to find the house clean, the children clean, and a meal ready," he said. He explained that the house is his wife's domain, and that what she will cook or what a child did is none of his business. "She shouldn't talk to me about these things," he said. However, he explained that there are certain things that he should know about, like if the children need new clothes, if they want to go out, if they are not feeling well or if they need food, "this is my role," he said. Thus, despite the flexibility present in Aly's household when it comes to activities relating to childcare, he still holds a gendered view of division of labor. But the fact that he proudly takes on tasks related to childcare points to how normative definitions of gender, and the related division of labor model, is fluid and changing.

He further told me that his wife is very good at choosing when to ask him if she needs anything, "A woman should pick a time when her husband's mind is clear, and so he can accept

whatever she says. This is a good woman who understands...like my wife. Other women constantly fight and demand things...this kind of woman makes a man hate the house,” he said. Furthermore, on her relationship with his mother, he told me that his mother does not like his wife, “Any woman on Earth does not like her daughter-in-law...because I was her’s and now I went to another woman,” he said. He explained that he tells his wife to try to tolerate her, and explains to her why she acts in the way she does, “so she accepts my mother’s bad treatment,” he said. Aly added, “My mother is an old woman so her brain does not function very well and my wife understands that. My mother loves me the love of a bear to his friend.” He explained that even though she snaps at his wife, and at everyone in the family, he cannot make her sad, and he has to be on her side, even though he knows that his mother is wrong most of the time. His wife, according to him, is aware of that and is able to cope well with it. This provides insight about the elevated status of the mother-in-law in some houses being the eldest member of the family, but it most importantly displays the intricacy of familial relationships and how they continuously involve the negotiation and renegotiation of positions and ways of behaving.

Aly clarified that he appreciates the position his wife places him in, “we are both the same person, but she gives me my position, and knows that I come after God, and that I have the first and the final word,” he said. But he also emphasized the importance of having his wife participate in the household’s decision-making process, “I have to make her feel that she has an important and shared role with me in our household,” he said. Importantly, Aly was perhaps the only man I spoke with who was very keen on telling me that he appreciates what his wife does. In his words:

I actually feel bad because she serves me more than I serve her. I make the money, but her role is much bigger than mine, and that’s why I feel very sorry for her. There are men here in the area who mistreat their wives. They keep shouting at them and humiliate them because they are the ones who get the money...they tell them “Do you have any idea what I had to do to get this money?”...they do not acknowledge their wives’ big role...they cook, clean, sweep, take care of the children. All men

do is go make money, but a woman is like a bee in her house, she is constantly running around, so I make sure that I am kind to her when I come back, I buy her something to make her happy, I sit with her, fool her with some nice talk. This way a man becomes everything to a woman. When I buy her something, she keeps thanking me and treats me so well in return. This way she acknowledges how hard I work, even though she works a hundred times harder than I do. But some men do not realize that, and tell their wives that what they do is insignificant. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

In Aly's household, his wife's role as a housewife and caregiver is highly valued, and is seen as a form of labor. Aly believes that paid work should not be more greatly valued just because it brings money. He also thinks that other men whom he spends time with at the local coffeehouse undervalue their wives' labor. Aly's account significant as it shows how normative ideologies of gender are not even and stable but are constantly being challenged.

Moreover, Aly told me that in his family, women are not allowed to seek paid work. He added that women are not allowed to share in the household expenses, "unless a man is sick so the woman goes out and works, and helps him out, but still the man would have the final word, and would be the one responsible for the house," he told me. This, however, does not apply to his household where he and his wife make decisions jointly, but to the rest of his family. He also thought that as a man, he is constantly under a lot of pressure, "a man has to always think about his family, and about his children's future," he said. However, he told me that there are a lot of fathers in the area who do not care about their children like he does. According to him, those men "make their wives work...they wake up in the afternoon and go to the local coffeehouse and smoke shisha. Since I was a young boy, I've been against this type of men." He further narrated:

Money is the only thing that can make a woman take the role of the man. The men who neglect their responsibilities force their poor wives to go out and work in order to fulfill the needs of the children...she goes around looking for work to get food for the children. Some women are "man-wives" meaning that they are not to be worried about to go outside and seek work. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Aly's term "man-wives" provides insight about how "manhood" as a category is something that is achieved through the performance of certain acts that resemble it. Thus, according to Aly's account, when a woman goes out to work in order to feed her children as the man refuses to fulfill the role that is socially required of him, she is seen as the "man" in the family. However, Aly told me that in cases like that, the man continues to have the final word in the house, which provides insight into how gender is being continuously employed as a means to establish hierarchy and power even at moments when the women fulfills the financial role.

In addition, the role of the family in reproducing how gender is acted out outside the boundaries of the house was evident in Aly's narrative. First, Aly told me about how a woman needs to wear certain clothing that is different than a man's clothing. "My wife cannot argue against what I tell her when it comes to clothes. In fact, the only thing that I control is what she can wear," he said. He added that she agrees with him and knows which clothing is "haram" and which is "halal." He explained that way of dress is dictated by both "religion" and "tradition," and that it is not acceptable for people in the area to comment on his wife's clothing. "All that reveals a woman's body is haram, this is what the prophet said. My views are like the majority of people from the area here when it comes to clothing," he further explained. Hence, and similar to the narratives of Azza and Salma, gendered clothing is crucial to the study of dominant gender ideology, and the narrative of appropriate women's clothing is continually being produced and reproduced within some families and is justified by dominant narratives of "religion" and "tradition." Second, he told me that a woman should be careful when she deals with people outside the house. According to Aly:

I always tell my wife that when she deals with someone on the market...the Quran says that a woman is by nature feminine and soft...so when my wife talks to people outside the house, she has to be harsh in the way she talks and deals so that people don't think she is not a "good" woman. She actually listens to me on that and comes

to tell me “what you said turned out right, when I deal in a harsher way, I feel that people are respecting me more.” This way nobody can look at her in a wrong way. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Thus, narratives of religion and “tradition” are once again employed in the family as a means to create normative gender behavior outside the house, and to reproduce the normative feminine/masculine binary with all the meanings attached to it. In an attempt to explain why he interferes in how his wife performs gender outside the house, Aly said:

A smart man makes a woman acquire some of his nature. God gave some men the gift of the mind, and so you’d find that the wife of a smart man eventually becomes more like him. But if the man is not a real man, you will find that his wife is also not very smart...because who will teach her? The wife is like a child, she eventually becomes like her husband...in the same way that we raise our children to become like us. If a man is dependable, smart, treats people well, and a real man, she will become the same. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

I found it slightly paradoxical that Aly genuinely valued his wife’s input and thought she was a reasonable and smart woman, and yet he described himself as the one with the “gift of the mind” and his wife as the “child” who learns from him. Despite the paradox, if we are to compare Aly’s narrative to that of Soha and Azza, it would be evident that a gender power struggle exists within families. It is not uncommon for both men and women to speak of their own selves as the more mature and the smarter person in the marital relationship, and to attribute this to their gender, which sheds some light about how marriage as a gendered institution is primarily about power, and thus it comprises a continuous power struggle over positions.

Aly also told me that his father was a contractor, and that he used to work with him from a young age in order to make more money:

I am not well-educated because I always wanted to make money, so I used to work and make good money from a young age. I was a young man from a *sha’by* area, so I liked to buy things and spend...so education was too restraining for me, I didn’t want to have to take pennies from my father. Work made me able to make more money, so I liked it. My father used to make good money and used to buy us things, but made each one of us understand his role, and that we need to be independent. He made me work very hard so I became like him. I learned how to be a man from

my father...and from the situations I found myself in, from solving problems, and from learning to do what is right and fair. But I also did many wrong and illegal things. I got engaged for more than seventeen times, and I was married three times. Most of my life before was about making money and spending this money, but I have changed. I am a new man now, and I put my family first. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Aly's account demonstrates how being a "man" is not a natural identity but a set of normative traits and actions that are repetitively performed (to draw on Butler) and are commonly taught within the family. But while he believes that his father taught him certain things, he clarified that there are things that he is critical of in his father's behavior, and that he actively chose not to reproduce those things:

My father lived in the age of *Sī -ElSayyed*. I learned everything from my father except for living like *Sī -ElSayyed*. I believe that life is about cooperation. My father was not like that. He had to come back to his kingdom and find his food ready...then he would take a nap and everybody should be very quiet so as not to wake him. What I took from him is to be a man in my house, and to be dependable. I think that the way my father used to be in the house was wrong, and so I did not want to be like him. My mother had nine children...and was like a slave around the house...and back then there were no washing machines and other appliances, so housework was even more exhausting for her. But he still did not have any mercy on her. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Thus, dominant gender ideologies are not mechanically reproduced, but are continuously questioned, challenged, and contested even by the men who are commonly viewed as the more privileged party in the familial hierarchy of gender. However, normative activities that are associated with being a "woman" are commonly being taught to girls among families in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab. Aly explained that his mother taught his sisters to be "women" from a very young age. "She would call my sister and teach her how to make Okra with tomato sauce (a popular Egyptian dish), and tells her that she had to know how to cook so that when she gets married, her husband's family won't say that she comes from a home that doesn't feed her," he said. He also explained how his mother used to teach his sisters how to act as "women"; "My mother used to tell my sisters "don't raise your voice so that people outside the house wouldn't think you have no

manners”,” he said. He explained that she used to plant in his sisters “appropriate” ways of behaving so that when they go to their husband’s houses they don’t do “wrong” things. “This starts at a very early age, so girls grow up to be shy, talk in a low voice, treat their mothers-in-law well. When my sisters grew up, they were able to take care of their houses, and take responsibility,” he told me. Thus, to draw on Lorber (1994, p. 60), gender as a process produces and reproduces the social differences that make-up the categories of “man” and “woman.” Throughout day-to-day social interaction of Aly’s sisters with their mother and relatives, they were taught how they should act, and consequently, they started acting in accordance to normative ways, and concurrently reproduce and uphold the gender imperative Lorber (1994, p. 60). The “injunction” to become a man or a woman occurs by means of discursive paths, in the case of Aly’s sisters, the discursive path is to be a good future housewife (Butler, 1990, p. 45). Individuals do not blindly reproduce dominant acts of gender, but they produce gender in virtually every human interaction, through either choosing to act out the behaviors that they have been taught to be suitable for their position, or choosing to resist them (Lorber, 1994, p. 60).

Aly also spoke of his children, and told me that he and his wife raise their children in a completely different way than the way their parents raised them. “I can never beat a child, even though I give the impression that I am violent and aggressive, which I was at some point in my life,” he said. He added:

I try to not let my son speak in a vulgar way to his sister. And if he does that, I punish him by not giving him any money. I give his sister but not him. Then he comes and apologizes and I tell him that this is wrong and that he should not do it again. My daughter is very smart; she does not give me the chance to make any remarks on her behavior. Her mother beats her but I can’t beat her. When her mother beats her, I cannot tell her not to because I think she does so for her own good. I feel sad from inside when she is beaten, but I know it is in her best interest. In about fifteen minutes, her mother makes up with her and so my daughter does not repeat what got her beaten in the first place. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

It is worth noting that his narrative points to that the mother is the one who employs violence as a disciplining mechanism in the house, not the father, which challenges dominant narratives about masculinity being tied to “toughness” and “violence.” In fact, he told me that when he fights with his wife, it affects his son and daughter, and so he tries not to shout at her or insult her. “I don’t want my child to register a bad impression about me. I try to make my kids like the house, and I try to let them like spending time with me. If I constantly shout at my kids, they will hate the house and being around me,” he said. Despite Aly’s disapproval of violence, and how he dissociates it from the “masculine” identity, a gendered treatment of children still exists in Aly’s household; he said, “In my family we do not spoil boys as we do with girls...even though I am originally from Upper Egypt and we prefer boys.” He also explained that his younger brother does not like girls, even though he has three daughters. “When I had my daughter, he wasn’t happy, even though I love girls. When I knew I was having a daughter, I was more than happy,” he said. When I asked him why he likes girls, he told me that it is because he feels that girls are “weak” and that they love their parents very much. He recalled:

Last week I came back very tired from work, so I ate, and then I slept on the floor for a while. When my daughter saw me, she brought a blanket and covered me, and started patting my back. She then gave me a kiss and left the room. My son would never do that. He is not as kind as she is. (Personal Interview, May 2015).

Aly’s views, thus, are influenced by a normative understanding of the feminine/masculine binary, which dictates that women are the “weaker” and more “empathetic” and “emotional” gender. His subscription to this discourse also influences the way his son has recently been behaving. According to Aly, “My son is showing signs of manhood even though he is only four years old. Once he saw his mother with a night gown and was dancing lightly to music on the television, so he told her she was being inappropriate.” At four years old, the son has already taken on the task of monitoring his mother’s and sister’s sexuality and “honor.”

The Story of Umm Emad

When I first met Umm Emad, an eighty-two-year-old woman, she was sitting at the entrance of her house surrounded by her grandchildren. In the background I saw three of her daughters-in-law doing her laundry. Umm Emad's husband passed away over twenty years ago, and left her with five sons. She told me that when her husband was alive, she was the one with the greater say in the family. "I am the one who took care of the kids, I am the one who married them and I am the one who supported them," she said. She told me that she was a housewife, and that her husband used to work at a kiosk that he owned that sells tea, and would come back every evening and give her the money that he made. She narrated:

If he made ten pounds he would give them to me and if he made fifteen pounds he would give them to me... I used to take the money and spend it as I see fit. I bought a small piece of land and I build it, without him knowing about this. Step by step, I built it. Until he died, all he did was come back and eat, and give me whatever money he made and I would manage house expenses. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Contrary to Sayyed's narrative, the seventy-eight-year old man I spoke with who views women from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab within a narrative of passivity, Umm Emad had a very active role in her household. In addition to caring for the children and running the household, she assumed the money-budgeting responsibility. She told me that she is the head of the family, and that both before and after her husband's death, her sons would consult her before taking any step. It is worth pointing out that Umm Emad believes that her husband had "granted" her the significant role and position that she had. As she narrated:

I think I was able to exercise a good deal of power in my household because my husband trusted me. My husband saw that I am the one who should take control, so he gave me the freedom to do so. A woman should leave her husband to decide and say what can be done and what can't be done. We had a good life together...I never left the house to my parents' even when we disagreed. May his soul rest in peace. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Thus, while Umm Emad had the greater power in her household, she believes that her husband, being a man, should delegate this position to her, which underscores how gender is first and foremost a stratification system founded in normative beliefs that give more power to the more “privileged” gender.

Despite her contention that her husband had delegated this role to her, she still believes that she was, and continues to be, “the one who did everything.” She told me that following her husband’s death, she began receiving pension from the government, which she partly used to buy her middle-son a small cart so that he can sell “*hawawshy*,” a popular Egyptian sandwich-like food. “My pension was around two hundred and fifty Egyptian pounds. I would go to the market and buy bread, eggs, sugar...I also bought clothes and food and resold them. I was able to manage things well, thankfully,” she said. She added that she later rented a small grocery shop for her middle-child in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab and that he has been running it for fifteen years now. “Now he is the one who is handling the responsibility of the household, he works and gives me the proceeds, just like his father. I take the money and spend it as I see fit and buy the household needs,” she said. Her middle son whom she is referring to lives with her with his wife and children, but all other four sons live in separate homes. It is evident from Umm Emad’s narrative that she holds a powerful position within her family, a position that she acquired with her husband’s consent. Not only was she the sole caregiver in her household, but she actively supported her children, and some of her grandchildren, both financially- through employing various survival strategies- and non-financially. Nevertheless, she spoke very fondly of her husband, “My husband made me see some very good days. He was a good man. If he gets a date, he would bring it to me...he brought me everything on his way back from work. In Ramadan, I can’t tell you how many things he used to get me,” she recalled. She sadly told me that even her sons are not like

their father, and that she cannot ask them for too much. “My sons can hardly support their own children, let alone their mother. I am happy when they are able to feed their children,” she said.

Umm Emad’s children and grandchildren come and stay with her multiple times a week.

When I visited her, her daughters-in-law were at her house doing her laundry. She told me:

All my daughters-in-law are here doing the laundry, except for my middle-son’s wife who is of no use...she doesn’t know how to cook, clean, do the laundry or even make a glass of tea for her husband...my kid whom she is married to makes the least money, poor thing. He comes back home and finds no meal or clean clothes. Poor kid. My other daughters-in-law come over and do the laundry for him. They also cook for us. If they don’t come for a day, my middle son’s wife is forced to come down and cook. She lives here with me, and has two daughters. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Umm Emad helps enforce a system of gender division of labor in her sons’ families. She is critical of her middle-son’s wife who is resistant to embodying the role of the housewife. As the head of the family and the member with the greater power, she has her daughters-in-law perform housework not only in their own houses but in hers as well.

In addition to caring for her children and helping them make a living, she told me that she takes care of one of her granddaughters whose parents are divorced, and who has been living with her ever since. “Her mother remarried, and I am the one who raised her,” she explained. She also raises another grandchild from one of her elder son’s previous marriages. “His mother sometimes comes and picks him up and takes him out...he is with her now as schools have not begun yet,” she told me. Umm Emad further said that she fears more for her granddaughters than her grandsons; “I don’t let the girls go out, but I let the boys go. The girls stay with me. If one of the girls goes out, I send another girl with her. They have to go out in pairs,” she explained. This further underscores how in many families, greater restrictions are placed on girls as opposed to boys, largely due to the factor of “fear” that was earlier discussed, as well as the dominant narrative

that girls require protection. This discourse is closely related to sexuality and honor and to dominant narratives about acts of rape and violence committed against women and girls. Furthermore, Umm Emad expressed how she wishes her grandchildren would live a life away from poverty. Specifically regarding her granddaughters, she told me she hopes that they marry good men like their grandfather, “there are no men like him now,” she said regrettably. This underscores how Umm Emad wishes to reproduce the idea of marriage, with the various normative connotations attached to it, in the case of her granddaughters.

When Umm Emad lived with her parents before marrying her husband, she used to help her father with work from a young age; “he had a cart and I used to go out with him for work,” she said. Even though Umm Emad has seven other sisters, and two brothers, she told me that because she was the eldest, she had to help her father at work. Contrary to Azza’s, Sayyed’s and Aly’s accounts that only the sons are sent to work from a young age regardless of whether they have older sisters, Umm Emad assumed this responsibility from an early age. This sheds some light about how familial dynamics, such as who helps provide, vary within and among families. Umm Emad also said that one of her sisters is like her, “she took full responsibility for her family after her husband’s death,” she said. Additionally, Umm Emad told me that their mother was a peasant who worked very hard to help their father, which shows how when a family’s survival is at stake, dominant narratives of gender division of labor are blurred. But despite the marginal conditions Umm Emad lived in with her parents, she nostalgically remembered the past, and condemned the present:

Life has changed a lot, everything has become more expensive, there are a lot more options, and nowadays it is a challenge for my sons to support their wives. There are no jobs nowadays...back then, a pound had value, now it doesn’t. Nowadays if you have a hundred pounds, you will spend them. Nowadays you buy bread with your national ID, how strange. When I was a kid, ten piasters were enough to fulfill

the household needs, my father used to give my mother five piasters, and we would find food in the house. When my father used to give us one piaster, we used to think that we had a lot of money. Nowadays people in the neighborhood fight with weapons, this was never the case before. When I was young, neighbors used to help each other out, now everyone minds their own business and families. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

The Story of Nesreen

Nesreen is a fifty-one year-old housewife with two daughters and a son. Her husband, who is also her cousin, is ten years her senior. His grandfather passed away in the 1967 war, and he has been doing house-painting jobs in affluent areas and gated communities like Kattamiyya Heights until he got ill a few years ago. Because of his job, their house, although located in a small alley, is nicely decorated, freshly painted and well-maintained, unlike other houses that I have visited in the area. Nesreen's husband used to receive an allowance from the government because of his illness but it suddenly stopped and they have not received it since 2012, as Nesreen mentioned. She told me that she and her husband are comfortable in their marriage at the moment, but that they used to fight a lot when they first got married. As she explained:

We used to fight a lot because he wanted to stay all day and night outside the house. Because of that, I never got the chance to discuss with him any matters or problems concerning our children. In the morning he goes to work and in the afternoon he goes to the local coffeehouse with his friends and come back home at one or two o'clock in the morning. Of course he should see his friends but he must devote time for the house and family as well. I suffered from this problem for years and my mother-in-law, who is also my aunt, supported me on this. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

However, she told me that as the years passed by she got used to the situation and her husband started spending more time at home. She added that later on they jointly agreed that they should discuss everything together in a calmer manner, which shows that within martial relationships, a process of negotiation and renegotiation takes places for the establishment of familial rules, modes of communication and positions. She also told me that despite her "strong" character, she tries to

listen to her husband as much as she could and tries not to repeat the things that he does not like “because I don’t want him to embarrass me in front of the children,” she said. As she clarified:

A man can be dominant over his wife and vice versa, but in all cases a woman must respect her husband. However, a man shouldn’t by all means humiliate his wife in public or in private and especially in front of their kids. When a woman is humiliated by her husband, she feels very bad and this negatively affects her behavior at home and with her children. When my husband embarrasses me in front of the children, it makes me very uncomfortable and sad. Mutual respect between a husband and his wife is very important. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Contrary to many of the narratives I have reviewed so far of people from both ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab and Zamalek, Nesreen did not mention that a man has to be dominant over his wife, but thought that this is something that varies among families. In fact, she told me that in her marriage neither she nor her husband “enforces their opinions” and that she believes that both men and women can have weak personalities within marriages and let the other party dominate them. However, she expressed her aversion towards her husband’s tendency to “embarrass and humiliate her” in front of the children. While in the marriage as a whole her husband might not be the more powerful, he tends to try to affirm his “masculinity” through being verbally violent towards her in the presence of the children, something which helps him construct a normative identity of himself as the “powerful male” within the family. But Nesreen is clearly against his attempts, and has employed a strategy to deal with those attempts; “I almost never oppose my husband in public. I always do what he wants and talk to him later in private. I sometimes also let my son talk to him. He listens to his son more than he does to me,” she explained. Thus, in order to avoid the construction of an identity of herself as the individual with the less powerful position in the family, she resorts to accepting her husband’s views in public and in front of the children, and then renegotiates with him various matters in private, or through her son, which is similar to what Soha expressed.

Nesreen told me that in her parents' house, where she lived before marriage with six sisters and two brothers, her father "dominated" her mother, which she attributed to them being from an older generation. "In my generation, there is much more understanding between a man and his wife," she said. She explained that her father was very strict and that she and her siblings had to listen to him without arguing, regardless of whether he is right or wrong. Her mother, she said, "was the one responsible for raising [them]." "She decided when and where we can go out and what to dress but my father took all the other decisions within the family," she explained. According to Nesreen's account, her father and mother assumed and acted out the normative roles dictated by dominant gender ideology, and dominant masculine/feminine narratives. While her mother assumed caregiving responsibilities, her father embodied normative "masculine" characteristics, where the man is assumed to have the greater "power" in the family. Furthermore, her account underscores how the normative roles and ideologies that were present in her parents' house were not reproduced in her marriage, which further points to how gender beliefs are not mechanically reproduced nor inherited. Yet I would like to note that I noticed a paradox in how Nesreen attributed her father's powerful position to her parents' older generation, on one hand, and in how she spoke of her mother-in-law as the "most powerful character" in the family, and the person who "always had the upper word in the house" not only with her but with her children, husband, and extended family. This elucidates that the way in which power relations are organized is highly subjective, and varies not only between but within families. She further spoke of her father, explaining that while he did not take a part in the disciplining of the children, which was her mother's responsibility, he "sometimes made remarks on our ways of dress," as she said. "He was very strict, but very kind at the same time. He loved us a lot, and used to feel bad after scolding any of us. I'm just like him," she remembered her father. Aside from emphasizing how her mother

and father used to monitor their daughters' clothing, she also said that she had an elder brother who:

...was very strict and we had to listen to him as well. We could never oppose him. He even become more rigid and closed-minded later on. We were always afraid of our older brother and always listened to what he said especially regarding what to wear and where to go. As girls we were never allowed to visit friends and neighbors, we were only allowed to go to school or to attend private lessons. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Her brother, who monitored her and her sisters' clothing, "never allowed [them] to put on trousers." Her parents and her brother, similar to what most of my 'Ishash Kum Ghurab interlocutors have indicated, played the role of the guardians of her and her sisters' "honor" and sexuality, which are closely tied to their clothing, along with other things. This provides insight about how body politics intersect with class, particularly considering that the issue of clothing was brought up by only one interlocutor in Zamalek (Salma). Nesreen then said "my husband is more flexible than my brother and father when it comes to clothing," which also indicates how the man-figure in the family is expected to control what is to be concealed or revealed from woman's body, either by restricting what she wears or giving her the freedom to dress as she wishes.

Moreover, Nesreen said that she discusses all her problems with her son and elder daughter, and they help her in making decisions, which points to that familial decision-making processes sometimes extend beyond the parents and the elder family members to older children as well. She also said that she has brought up her daughters in the same way the she has been brought up, but that she "spoils them a little bit more" so that they feel comfortable talking to her about the problems they face. She added:

I am stricter than my husband with the girls because I want to protect them from falling into problems. Girls shouldn't be allowed to wear anything tight or revealing like sleeveless blouses for example. They don't like it sometimes when I am too strict about what they wear but girls must look decent. I also sometimes advise the

girls to stay away from friends that I feel their behavior is not good. They don't always listen but usually my judgement turns out to be right and they regret not listening to me. As for my son, he is very sensible and I don't need to guide him on almost anything. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Nesreen closely monitors her daughter's clothing and who she is friends with, but feels that there is no need to do the same with the son whom she describes as "sensible," which points to the modes of gendered treatment that parents undertake in the family. But it is worth noting that despite how the girls' clothing is closely monitored, Nesreen said that she allows her daughters to wear clothes that she wasn't allowed to wear, but "with limits," which also indicates that Nesreen does not merely reproduce beliefs about women's clothing that were present in her parent's house, but that she actively questioned them and formed her own beliefs regarding that matter. Importantly, Nesreen's son, and her elder daughter's fiancé, also partake in monitoring the girls, especially when it comes to their online activity:

Girls start to become really difficult when they turn twelve. I hate the internet. It worries me a lot. My daughter posted her picture once on Facebook when she was fifteen. Her brother and I forced her to remove it and she did. Later on she was convinced that what she did was wrong. My son and I always keep an eye on the girls when they use the internet. And now my daughter's fiancée also monitors this. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Once again, the mother and the men in the family assume the role of monitoring and safeguarding the morals of the girls, who are viewed as endangered and in need of protection. Nesreen expressed her fondness of her daughter's fiancé particularly because he took on this role, which she said makes her feel relieved because she knows he will "protect" her daughter. The young man, who is a colleague of her daughter's at the high institute where she studies, was described by Nesreen as "a decent man just like [her] son." She added, "We respect him because he proposed right away and didn't think of flirting with her as other men do." Nesreen told me that she would like her daughters to seek paid work after graduation, and that the younger daughter wants to join the army when she graduates, but that if "their husbands don't want them to work they should listen. My

son in law doesn't want my elder daughter to work and frankly she doesn't want to work as well. She doesn't have any ambitions regarding her career," she said. While her approval of her younger daughter joining the army sheds some light about how she challenges normative understandings of gender, her narrative about her elder daughter and fiancé shows that some parents seek to "transfer" the power they had over their daughters to their sons-in-law after marriage, regardless of how power works in their daughters' marriages (i.e. it could be that her daughter is the one who made the decision to not seek paid work after marriage, but it seems from Nesreen's account that it was a joint decision). Moreover, and paradoxically, Nesreen's words imply a belief that in her daughter's marriage the husband has to have the final say despite her contention that her own marriage does not work this way.

The Story of Nawal

Nawal is a thirty-four-year-old housewife. Her husband used to work in dying leather for other people, and now owns his private business in the same field. "The business was very slow at the time of the revolution, but now it is much better. We eat and drink, we are doing fine," she said. She lives with her husband and three daughters in the multiple-story family house that they share with her husband's mother, his three brothers and their wives. Nawal is a unique case to my ethnographic study; I could not meet her in her house and we had to meet at her brother-in-law's place because her husband does not approve of strangers visiting their house. Additionally, he was sleeping during the interview and Nawal expressed her concern that we could wake him up if we did the interview in her place. It was clear from the beginning that Nawal's husband employs dominant narratives of gender that view the man as the most "powerful" in the family as a means to exercise power over his wife and children. Contrary to other women who described their husbands as the more powerful but, after deeper exploration, it was clear that they hold powerful

positions in the household, Nawal's case is different. But that does mean that she does not employ various strategies of resistance to her husband's power, which will be explored in the next few pages. When asked about power in her family, Nawal said:

I believe the one who has the upper hand in a family is the one who has a strong character and can influence other members of the family. Within my family, my husband is the one who has the upper hand in everything and we must all follow without even arguing. He always wants things to happen his way regardless of whether they are right or wrong. He is very stubborn and rarely listens to my opinion regarding any issue. And if my opinion turns out to be the right one regarding any matter, he would never admit it. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

Nawal added that things were very different when they were engaged; "We used to talk for hours and exchange opinions about different matters. He listened to me then," she regrettably said. She also told me that she got engaged to him when she was sixteen and that she "didn't know anything about life at that time." She explained that even though her husband is only six years her senior, which she thought is not a big difference, she "acquired all [her] life experiences and how to deal with people through him." "I didn't have a strong personality, but at least we could discuss different matters together when we were engaged," she said. The way in which gender operates as a stratification system within households is highly evident in Nawal's narrative. This was further evident in that she saw a man as someone "who is totally free to go out at any time and do whatever they want while a woman [as someone] who is not granted the same freedom." Furthermore, she was keen on emphasizing how she tries not to "upset" her husband as much as she can, and she said, "I know that I can get divorced if I insist on my opinion on important issues. If I have a problem I never consult my mother. I am always afraid that my husband finds out and scolds me or beats me for doing this. I only complain to my friends on the phone." Additionally, she told me that she used to work outside the house before marriage and that she wishes she would go back to her paid job but that her husband is against it.

But because Nawal's husband exerts power over her does not mean that she is a passive subject. According to Foucault, "[power is] coextensive with resistance; productive, producing positive effects; ubiquitous, being found in every kind of relationship, as a condition of the possibility of any kind of relationship" (Kelly, 2009, p. 38). Furthermore, in volume I of *Histoire de La Sexualité*, Foucault argues that "where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1978, p. 95). Thus, relations of power are not merely relationships between the "oppressor" and the "oppressed," but rather, they resemble active relationships that entail resistance (Balan, 2010, p. 39). Without resistance, it will not be possible to understand relations of power (p. 39). Nawal's resistance to the power that her husband exercises is particularly evident in their relationship with their two daughters. As Nawal told me, her husband did not want to have girls, she explained:

He always wished that our three daughters were boys. He feels that he is unlucky because he cannot depend on them in some matters that he believes only boys can do, like going out to buy groceries or cigarettes in the evening or at night. He also says he favors boys because they carry the family name and pass it on to their children, but girls don't. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

She told me that this attitude adversely affects the girls especially the elder one. Nawal further explained that her husband wanted the girls to stay at home after middle school and that she refused. "Even I myself have a high school diploma," she said. She added that her husband constantly "threatens" her elder daughter that if she doesn't get excellent grades in her final year in middle school, she will be forced to stay at home and will not be sent to high school. Moreover, she told me that her husband wanted her elder daughter to wear a *gallabiyah*, but that she refused and begged him not to force her to do so until he finally agreed. She told me that while she agrees with her husband that girls should not go out on their own and should not wear tight clothes, she disagrees with his desire to exercise what she described as an "extreme" form of control over her

daughters. Importantly, Nawal explained to me that much of the restrictions that she places on her daughters have to do with the place where they live. As she said:

The place where we live forces us to be strict with the girls. Men here sit in local coffeehouses on the streets and keep staring at girls and make comments about the way they dress and their behavior. If the place where we live was better, we wouldn't have minded what we wear that much. Men here stare even at women who wear the veil or the *niqqab*. My younger sister is in her second year in college. She lives in Manial, a better neighborhood, and wears whatever she likes. When I was young, men were not like this. I am only trying to adjust to the place where I live. (Personal Interview, April 2015).

Hence, Nawal perceives the nature of 'Ishash Kum Ghurab as a factor influencing the gender discourse produced within the household, particularly when it comes to clothing and ways of behaving outside the house. It is also clear from Nawal's refusal to let her husband force her daughters to drop out of school, as well as from her opposition to her husband's desire to have their daughters wear *gallabiyahs*, that her children are a site through which she exercises resistance in her household. In addition to directly resisting her husband when it comes to clothing and remaining at school, she indirectly employs other forms of resistance that are also exercised through her children. She told me that she constantly tries to motivate her daughters to study hard; "I tell my elder one that if she doesn't study hard, she will end up washing and cleaning at home like a maid," she said. In doing that, Nawal is indirectly resisting her husband's desire to have the elder daughter drop out of school through pushing her to fulfill her husband's condition for remaining at school: getting good grades. Furthermore, she told me that he does not allow the girls to go out, and so she has them go with her while she runs errands, which I also view as an indirect form of resistance. It was also interesting to me that Nawal frequently joked about her husband's behavior when we were sitting together, telling me that he is about to wake up soon and might come up to her brother-in-law's place where we sat and scold the both of us. This resonates with Abu-Lughod's (1990, p. 45) argument about what she refers to as "sexually irreverent discourse,"

which she defines as the form of resistance that women exercise as they mock men and the idea of manhood despite how dominant narratives praise manhood. This form of resistance, as she explains, is directed towards the very idea of manliness along with the privileges it encompasses (p. 45). It is also worth noting that Nawal expressed how important it is to her that her daughters have a say in their households when they grow up, “I feel very bad because my opinion is always ignored,” she said, which gives insight about how women in the position of Nawal are always keen that their daughters are not placed in this very position. Nonetheless, another element struck me in Nawal’s account, which is that her daughters partake in the power struggle that exists in the household, and try to manipulate it in their own favor. According to Nawal, “my daughters are constantly scared of my husband. Sometimes they criticize me in front of him when I do something they know he doesn’t like. They do it unintentionally just to please him. They don’t mean to upset me,” she said. Not only that, but the husband tends to “scold [her] in front of the girls for their mistakes.” She said that this saddens her and that she wishes he would just punish them and then talk to her later in private, “they should be held accountable for their mistakes,” she added.

Nawal further told me that in her parents’ household where she used to live with her five sisters and two brothers, “things were almost the same,” she said. She told me that her mother and elder sister assumed the roles of taking care of the household. “My dad had the last word in everything,” she also said. But she then paused and added:

The truth is that my father favored the girls because we helped him in almost everything. My father was a peasant and we helped him daily in his work. On the other hand my two brothers were too lazy and refused to help. I used to help my mother with the house chores as well (Personal Interview, April 2015).

Thus, Nawal’s parents’ household was different than her’s, after all. The fact that her father favored the girls shows that gender ideologies are fluid and vary among households. They are constantly shifting based on day-to-day situations; Nawal’s father preferred girls because they helped him out

more that the boys and not because dominant gender ideology dictates so. Furthermore, she told me that her parents used to trust her elder sister who is nine years her senior and used take her opinion on all matters. “She was helpful, responsible and trust worthy,” she said. This points to how some younger women hold significant positions within their families.

The Story of Mahmoud

Mahmoud is a twenty-nine-year-old man who is originally from a village in Minya. He told me that he ran away from the village when he was only eleven, and came to ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab.

As he said:

I ran away many times and was caught, until I finally made it out of there. In the village I used to watch old movies, and used to dream about seeing the train, coming to Cairo and going to parties that I see in the movies. It is like a dream came true...but I worked very hard and went through tough times until I got here. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Mahmoud’s urban dream was met with numerous obstacles. After moving to Cairo, he worked at multiple places until he finally got a job at a cultural center. His family, he said, only started to approve of him living in Cairo after they saw him on satellite television in a documentary that he participated in. As he told me, after they saw him on television, they started being happy about him being in Cairo, “they even wanted to celebrate so they made a nice meal, bought sweets, and invited our extended family over to watch me on television,” he said. “To them, being on TV is a really big thing,” he added.

Nevertheless, he told me that while they finally approved of him living in Cairo, they “pressured [him] into marrying [his] cousin.” He explained that he never saw his wife before marriage and that he had last seen her when she was sixteen. He married her when she was twenty one. “I didn’t know anything about her between the ages of sixteen and twenty one,” he said. He

added that in his family, girls and boys are not allowed to socialize in any way, and that there is complete segregation. “If a girl likes a boy, there is no way she can tell him,” he said. He described marriage in his family as “very traditional,” and told me that there is a lot of family control over both girls and boys. “They force us to marry from the family, and they are the ones who choose who we are to marry,” he clarified. In fact, he described his marriage as “a conspiracy,” and explained:

My parents were very sneaky in the way they convinced me to marry my cousin...they just sold it to me and I have no idea how it happened. It was a trap. I went to the village on vacation and my father told me that my mother is sick and that I have to come. I told him I want to speak to her on the phone, but he said she will not be able to. It turned out that she was not sick, and that they wanted me to go back to marry the girl. It also turned out that my cousin was supposed to marry another cousin whom she hated, and so she was psychologically unwell as a result. My parents said that they will not marry but that I should fix the situation, and that I am “valentino” so I should be able to do that. But what if she herself does not want me? She would just accept me to avoid marrying our other cousin. They tried to make the situation much bigger than it really is so they would trap me in this marriage...and I soon found myself engaged... I don’t know how. I was brainwashed to the extent that I was actually happy about the engagement. On the marriage night, I knew it was a big mistake. No matter how much I tell you, I won’t be able to describe how big of a mistake it was. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Mahmoud’s narrative showcases how some parents are able to exercise power over their children even if they do not live in proximity. While his parents continue to live in the village in Minya, they still have a strong influence over him and his choices. That being said, and to once again draw on Foucault (1978) and Balan (2010), relations of power are not just relationships between the dominant and the dominated, but they represent active relationships that involve resistance, which is evident in how Mahmoud chose to run away several times from the village.

He further explained that in the village, the parents should both agree together on who they want to marry their son or daughter to and they have to agree on whether their son or daughter will marry from the father’s or the mother’s family. “Usually it is from the father’s side due to land

inheritance issues,” he said. But there were moments, both before and after the engagement, that Mahmoud expressed how he does not want to marry his cousin, which further points to the ways in which he exercised resistance. He told them that he did not wish to marry from his family at all, and his mother agreed. In fact, he explained to me that before they married him off, he had already decided that he wants to marry a French girl whom he met in Cairo at the cultural center where he works. He told me that he took her to meet his parents, and that his mother liked her but his father was against it. He explained that his father was opposed to the marriage it because she was very different from him, but that he found this difference to be good for him. Mahmoud’s desire to marry a girl that he perceives as “different” particularly when it comes to how she does gender shows that individuals do transcend the normative and the familiar. Mahmoud, in fact, had a strong desire to embrace a different “version” of how women do gender, that embodied by the French girl.

Mahmoud additionally said that his parents raised him in a way that is very different than how things are in Cairo, more generally, and in the cultural center, more specifically. He said that his ideas changed a lot when he began working at the center. He explained:

People whom I meet here are all positive, loving, artistic...and unique. My eyes opened to so many different things that I never saw before. Here I met all kinds of people, from all backgrounds and nationalities...so I made up a whole new belief system through taking different beliefs from different people. I was very different than the way I am now...if you had met twelve years ago...I was very different. So it was not easy to just go back and marry my cousin. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Mahmoud told me that his wife, who is also his cousin, was brought up in an “extremely closed” environment. He described her family’s beliefs as very “traditional,” and told me that they raised her to not interact or socialize with anybody. “This makes it very hard for her to live here with me, so she lives between here and the village in Minya,” he said. Mahmoud mentioned that he has

problems with his wife because her beliefs are very different. He also said that because of the romantic relationship that he had before marriage, “it is very difficult not to see the huge difference between my wife and my past girlfriend. It is difficult not to compare them to each other.” Moreover, he said he dislikes that his wife “only interacts with people from the same background....she does not interact with people who are more open minded so she can learn from them, she only mingles with *sha’by* people [a class-based category, as earlier emphasized, which he employed to refer to people living in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima],” as he said. Nonetheless, Mahmoud told me that his biggest problem with his wife is of a sexual nature:

I have a big problem with my wife’s sexual indifference...she was genitally mutilated. I feel that this has affected other things as well, like how she always accepts any opinions. She does not have any form of sexual desire. Female genital mutilation is a disaster. I don’t understand why women are genitally mutilated...sex is a natural aspect of every human’s body. God created sex so that people would get closer to one another and love one another. I am not married just to feed another person, I am married to live with a partner and to exchange love, sex and every other aspect of life. But this is of course not the case. A man can love a woman just for sex. Things could have been different if my wife was not genitally mutilated. She loves me, but I feel that there is no sexual, bodily, or verbal expression of this love. Also, the way she is was raised is that she was constantly told what she should not be doing. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Mahmoud further explained that if he had loved his wife, he would have done many things for her. He told me that when a problem arises between his wife and parents, he does not “defend” his wife. “I don’t feel the urge to do so,” he said. He added that the only reason he is continuing in his marriage is for the sake of his daughters. He compared his relationship with his wife to that with his past girlfriend, and told me:

Her touch, her walk was full of love. My love to her was instinctual, especially because I come from a very closed society. This affected my relationship with my wife as I do not find this with my wife. The only thing that she does is to serve me...feeding me, cleaning, and washing my clothes. Her main task is to take care of my needs. My role as a man is to work and make money. It would have been better if I had married the French girl. I think my dreams were killed. When I see an educated girl, I wish she is my life partner and wife. If I had married her, I could

have known what the ideal is like...but now I don't know. If she had told me that she wants to work, I would have said yes, because this is something that she is capable of doing, but it is not the same with my little-educated wife. My wife has her limits, she does not know anything beyond what she was raised to know...and she is incapable of doing many things. She would rather stay in the village most of the time. I tried to teach her, but her nature and the way she was raised are very dominant. She will never be able to change. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

There are several aspects that are worth pinpointing in Mahmoud's narrative about his wife and past girlfriend. His account shows how, to some individuals, female genital mutilation affects gender ideologies produced within the family. In Mahmoud's case, he saw a genitally mutilated woman to "lack" many elements that surpass sexual desire. His narrative also showcases how sex and sexuality are a site through which gender is produced and reproduced within families. His view of sex was highly gendered, which was particularly evident in his contention that "a man can love a woman just for sex." Furthermore, Mahmoud's account points to how some men's perception of a woman as "educated" changes the way they do gender. Because Mahmoud's wife is illiterate, he believes that she is only able to do housework, which he greatly undervalues. There is no doubt that many individuals tie education to the workings of gender and power within the family, which was vastly evident throughout my ethnographic research.

As mentioned earlier, Mahmoud has two daughters with his wife. When he spoke of this subject, he teared up as he told me that he is very sad that he had children with her. He mainly spoke of his eldest daughter, as the younger one is still a new-born. He explained that because of his family's overwhelming control, he knows that "she will be raised well but she will only stay within confined boundaries, meaning that she will be fed then will grow up and get married and that is it," he said. He told me that although he intends to open her eyes to different things, his parents are the ones in control at the moment because they are older. He paused and then added that if he would have married his French girlfriend, he would have been sure that his children

“would be raised in the best way possible.” He told me that he had always hoped that if he ever marries and has children that he would be able to raise them differently than the way he was raised, “it would have made me feel that I did something good and positive in my life,” he said. While Mahmoud’s view of how his life would have looked like had he married his girlfriend is highly romanticized, it implies that women’s role in contributing to the ideas of their children cannot be underestimated, at least from Mahmoud’s viewpoint. Additionally, his account further points to how his parents have a powerful role in his life despite that they continue to reside in the village. Nevertheless, and as I mentioned earlier, his children are a site where he exercises resistance. As he said:

My elder daughter is very smart and a fast-learner. I always try to think of a way out for her. I don’t want her to live my family’s life. I don’t even want her to go to a public school. I want her later on to see the things that I saw. I want her to be raised differently than I was raised. Even if I will not be able to change anything, I keep telling myself that I want my daughter to be very-well educated...I want her to know French and English. Now, my parents do not oppose this. But this is of course a result of long exhausting discussions with them. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

In fact, his account points to that his resistance has led a process of renegotiation with his parents regarding his daughters’ education. When Mahmoud mentioned to me the role of his parents in making decisions concerning his daughters, I asked him to explain further, so he told me that there are decisions that he makes as their father, and there are others that he doesn’t. He said that while he makes some minor decisions, such as what clothes he will buy them, his father takes his salary every month and leaves him only a part of it. For that reason, he said, he is unable to decide on which school his daughters will go to because it involves finances. “My father saves my money for me, or buys a piece of land with it. He also sometimes uses it for house expenses,” he explained. He then took a deep breath and said, “I want my [elder] daughter to go to a private school, so I try to think of how I can do that from my salary without disappointing my parents. I have to balance

both issues.” Aside from education, Mahmoud told me that while he is against female genital mutilation, he will not be able to tell his parents to not genitally mutilate his daughters. He told me:

If I tell my parents that I don’t want my daughters to be genitally mutilated, they will tell me that they will have sex with all men when they are teenagers. To them, if a girl goes out with a boy, or wears a sleeveless shirt then this is a shame to the family. I don’t understand female genital mutilation...sex is a natural aspect of every human’s body. (Personal Interview, March 2015).

Thus, while Mahmoud is able to exercise resistance when it comes to particular issues such as his daughters’ education, he is still unable to oppose his parents when it comes to other alarming issues, such as female genital mutilation. But Mahmoud emphasized that he will keep trying and teared up as he said, “I wish that my children do not go through my experience. I want them to live a better life and to see the world through a different eye.”

Summary

In this chapter, the accounts of five women and four men from the area of ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima have been put forward. As their accounts have revealed, gender is a fluid process that varies not only between but within families. The narratives have provided significant insight about the workings of power within the household which vary among families. All of the women I spoke with in the area are housewives; Soha, Nesreen and Nawal are currently married, Azza is divorced, and Umm Emad is widowed. Their accounts have varied significantly; Soha, while emphasizing that the husband should have the upper hand in the household, has underscored that a process of negotiation and renegotiation have taken place in her household throughout her seven years of marriage. She explained that her position has elevated throughout this period, and that her husband consults with her on all matters. Her significant position extends beyond her household to that of her husbands’ family as she maintains a good position vis-à-vis her mother-

in-law, which counters many of the Egypt literature that view the mother-in-law as the most powerful woman within the household. Nawal's account, on the other hand, revealed that her husband is able to exercise power within the household that is justified by means of his socially-constructed gender. Because power is always met with resistance, as Foucault has argued, Nawal uses her children as a site through which she exercises such resistance. The accounts of the men were also significantly diverse; while Sayyed maintained that he is the most powerful in his household, and that his wife's disobedience is met with physical violence, Aly highly valued his wife's unpaid housework and challenged dominant gender ideologies by assuming some of the roles that are widely considered as "women's" tasks.

Furthermore, and similar to the accounts of the women and men whom I spoke with in Zamalek, familial gender ideologies are not mechanically adopted by children, but are frequently questioned before children decide whether or not they wish to follow. Nevertheless, gendered rearing of children was common among the narratives of my 'Ishash Kum Ghurab interlocutors; while girls were frequently asked to help their mothers with household activities, boys were encouraged to spend time with their fathers and some were sent to work from a young age, which emphasizes conformance with dominant narratives of gender division of labor. There were exceptions to this pattern, however, like Umm Emad who worked with her father on his cart from a young age despite having brothers.

Moreover, narratives of honor and modest clothing were frequently brought up: most of my interlocutors have pointed to the importance of women's modest clothing, and the role of the father, husband and brother in the monitoring of a woman's clothing, morals, and sexuality was heavily emphasized. Additionally, the theme of sex only emerged in the 'Ishash Kum Ghurab accounts; while Sayyed emphasized that he is entitled to his wife's body and that "she cannot

oppose” his sexual demands, Mahmoud was unsatisfied with his marriage largely due to the fact that his wife has been genitally mutilated. Mahmoud’s dissatisfaction extended beyond his feeling that she lacks sexual desire; he felt that her genital mutilation has made her less able to have an independent personality within the household. This points to that sex and sexuality are a site through which gender is produced and reproduced in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab families.

Chapter Four: Emergent Themes and Concluding Notes: Gender in the family as a persistent battle of power, resistance and compliance

“To operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination.”
— Judith Butler (Gender Trouble)

This thesis has engaged in a cross-class exploration of the various gender ideologies produced, reproduced, contested and upheld by families in two socio-economically variant areas, Zamalek and ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima. In line with my initial hypothesis, families in the two areas do not hold substantially contrasting ideas and understandings of gender. Yet, this cross-class exploration enabled me to comprehensively explore how various elements tied to the category of class (such as income, survival strategies, neighborhood dynamics and exposure to dominant modernist narratives) influence how gender is produced, reproduced, upheld and challenged in those two areas. Because most ethnographies on Egypt focus on lower-income neighborhoods, as I have illustrated in chapter one, my thesis has attempted to fill a research gap through considering two different layers of the Egyptian population. In this chapter, I will highlight the most significant themes that were visible throughout my research with the underlying goal of tracing the modes through which gender ideologies are produced, reproduced, upheld and challenged in the two neighborhoods of ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab and Zamalek. Through the discussion of the most emergent themes, the chapter will highlight any visible differences in the way in which gender is understood and contested in each of the two neighborhoods, given the unique background of each.

The family: A site for the continuous enactment of power and resistance

It is perhaps useful to go back to Foucault’s volume I of *Histoire de La Sexualité* where he argues that, “where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this

resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1978, p. 95), as previously cited. In ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab and Zamalek alike, the family entails manifold relations of power and can be viewed as a site where power and resistance are continually enacted. While some of the literature about the Egyptian family has underscored the role of the family in producing the ideas of its members, including Singerman (1995) who introduced the concept of the “familial ethos” and consequently argued that this “ethos” pushes individuals to follow familial norms, my research has shown that individuals do not blindly follow familial beliefs about gender, but either actively reproduce or resist those norms and beliefs. This also applies to Blume and Blume’s (2003, p. 786) contention that parents’ perceptions of gender are frequently adopted by children, whether those perceptions are an acceptance or rejection of the prevalent discourse of gender. Only a few narratives resonated with Singerman’s and Blume and Blume’s arguments, yet and even for those narratives, a comprehensive exploration and analysis of them has revealed that, for some, familial gender beliefs were met with resistance, and for others, life circumstances have led individuals to question those beliefs. In Zamalek, Farida’s narrative implied the strongest parental influence. Through the employment of the discourse of fear, Farida’s mother has affected her decision to stay in her marriage. The view that Farida adopted with the influence of her mother, that things would “become worse” if she is to leave her marriage, has played a role in underpinning Farida’s position in her marriage. Thus, the discourse of “fearing the unknown” is used as a mode of legitimizing particular social practices that might unfavorably affect subject positions, as it did with Farida. Farida, however, mentioned that her belief system regarding gender in the family has “completely transformed” later on in life based on her life experiences, which is apparent in her narrative about her children. In some other cases, siblings (along with parents) also hold powerful positions. For example, in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Azza’s parents and siblings had a powerful position in the family

that enabled them to influence her decision to remarry, even though she did not want to. After her second and third divorces, circumstances pushed Azza to become the household head, and she currently sees herself as able to “perform the roles of both the woman and the man.” Mahmoud’s case also stood out as it shows how some parents are able to exercise power over the children even if they do not live in proximity. While his parents live in Minya, they were able to pressure him into marrying his cousin. In his words, they “brainwashed” him to marry her. But that does not cancel out the possibility of resistance. Mahmoud has resisted his parents through running away from the village to ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab over ten years ago, and continues to resist in various ways. His resistance to ways of doing gender in his family was evident through his initial choice to marry a French girl, whom he described as “different” from women in his family particularly in the way she performs and understands gender. Despite his various acts of resistance, he told me that he is unable to resist his parents’ decision to genitally mutilate his daughters, although he is against the act, due to their firm beliefs about its importance, but that he will keep trying. It was also common among parents in both areas to adopt gendered modes of child rearing, for example, Aly from ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab explained that in his parents’ house, his mother used to plant in his sisters “correct” ways of behaving from a very young age so that they act appropriately in their husbands’ houses and become “good” housewives. Yet, again, most children in both neighborhoods do not automatically adopt gender understandings of parents, but actively question those beliefs and consequently decide whether to abide or reject. Regardless of how “rigid” some accounts may seem at first, my interlocutors’ narratives have generally implied the fluid and-ever changing nature of gender, which was particularly evident when they compared how gender operates in their households, in their parents’ and grandparents’ households, and in their children’s households.

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe how for some women and men, like Nawal and Mahmoud from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, children are a site through which resistance is enacted. To recall, Nawal both directly and indirectly resisted her husband's desire to have the elder daughter drop out of school, and to have her two daughters wear *gallabiyahs*, despite her husband's seeming dominant power in her family. Similarly, Mahmoud actively resisted, negotiated and renegotiated with his parents matters regarding his daughters' education. Additionally, and contrary to much of the Egypt literature on the household, my research has shown that the mother-in-law, for the most part, does not have an all-encompassing form of power over the daughters-in-law. This holds true for both areas of Zamalek and 'Ishash Kum Ghurab. Interestingly, there were cases where the opposite was true. Suzan, for example, was unhappy with her daughter-in-law's "excessive control" which, according to her, has led her to keep her husband from seeing his mother. There were some cases, however, in which this theory applied, particularly in the case of Umm Emad, the eighty-two-year-old woman from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, who described herself as the household head and who had her daughters-in-law at her house doing the washing when I visited. Yet this does not eliminate the possibility of resistance from her daughters-in-law.

Importantly, marital relationships of power were among the central aspects of this research given how marriage is integral to the institution of the Egyptian family. Within marriage, power and resistance are simultaneously exercised. Additionally, some of my respondents' narratives have shown that a process of negotiation and renegotiation takes place for the establishment of household rules, ways of communication and positions within marriage, but also within the family as a whole. While many women and men in both areas have noted that the man has the greater power in the family, and many attributed this power to decision making capacity, it appeared that women played active parts in either maintaining or resisting this power (whether directly or

indirectly) as I further explored those relationships. Furthermore, some women neither resisted nor contested power from their husbands as they held equal or greater positions of power. The way in which power operates in marriage varies among families and a homogenous model of power in marriage is impossible to sketch. This holds true both within and among social classes. That is, we cannot outline a model of familial power relationships for 'Ishash Kum Ghurab nor can we do the same for Zamalek. I have spoken with Huda from Zamalek who was satisfied with her late husband having the upper hand in her family, and it worked in her favor. I have spoken with Azza from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab who asked her husband for a divorce when he wanted to marry a second wife, albeit she did not view her opposition as a form of resistance, even though it clearly was an active mode of contestation. I have spoken with Nazly from Zamalek who was dissatisfied that her husband "lacked" the "masculine" power that she thought was necessary in her marriage, and who was also dissatisfied with the fact that she had significant decision-making power. I have spoken with Omar from Zamalek who said that power is to a great extent shared in his marriage, but that he has the final word upon disagreement. In 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, I have spoken to Soha who said that her husband has the upper hand in her marriage but who later told me, "he cannot take a step without telling me." I have spoken with Nawal whose husband clearly had the upper hand in most matters and whom she resisted through her children. I have spoken with Umm Emad who said that she is the head of the household. I have also spoken with Sayyed who said he frequently resorted to physical and verbal violence when his wife did not listen to him, and who heavily relied on the maintenance-obedience formula. He believed that through his maintenance role, he is granted his wife's "sexual and reproductive labor" (Al-Sharmani, 2010 p. 11).

The Masculine/Feminine binary, power and the social audience

Apparent throughout my research in both neighborhoods was a deep attachment to the masculine/feminine binary along with the various normative connotations attached to it. Most (if not all) of my interlocutors saw the gender binary with its historical, behavioral and cultural attachments to be founded in human biology (West and Zimmerman, 1987). The way in which the social construction of gender is concealed is closely tied to how it is manifested through continuous acts, to draw on Butler (1988). The essentialist understanding of the masculine/feminine binary is constructed in a way that hides the performative element of gender (1988, p. 528). What is perhaps more important than studying the prevalent attachment of a set of traits to each gender and understanding those as ever-present and natural is that the masculine/feminine binary has led to the construction of ideas about hierarchy and power (Jackson and Balaji, 2011, p. 22). In many instances, the women and men whom I spoke with strived to maintain a particular image of “ideal” masculinity and femininity. In fact, there were times where the absence of essentialist masculine/feminine characteristics has resulted in the dissatisfaction of some individuals with their marital relationships, like in the case of Nazly from Zamalek. Nevertheless, and while she was dissatisfied with the “less-than-ideal masculine” character of her husband, Nazly articulated how she did not see herself to fit in the category of the mother and the caregiver, and that she performed those roles out of obligation. In most cases, women as well as men sought to maintain essentialist masculine/feminine characteristics (that are closely tied to familial positions and identities) and to enforce them on other family members. Normative masculine identities were not the only elements that emerged in my research. In fact, it was evident that many women saw their own gender to have made them more “tolerant,” “responsible,” “better at budgeting” and sometimes “smarter.” Men, similarly, attributed certain elements to their gender. Aly from ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab saw men to hold the “gift of the mind” and Sameh from Zamalek thought that men “naturally” have more

life experiences than women, which makes them better at making decisions. This provides insight about the power struggle that the gendered family entails. But perhaps the most striking aspect is how some of my interlocutors, from both areas, emphasized the need to maintain an “ideal” image of masculinity in front of the social audience, regardless of whether this image is sustained behind closed doors. The narratives of Sameh and Nazly from Zamalek and Soha and Nesreen from Misr-Al Qadima are good examples of this particular aspect. In the case of Soha, while she stressed on that her husband has to consult her on all matters, she said that she does not give her opinion in his family’s presence but only in private so as to maintain a particular image of their relationship in front of them. This applies to Nesreen from Masr Al-Qadima as well. Nazly also provided similar insight as she told me that she only tells her son her opinion “behind his wife’s back” so that she does not know that his mother influences his decisions. In Sameh’s case, the performance of masculinity to the social audience was tied to money and the breadwinning responsibility. But Sameh is not a unique case in that matter; the tendency to tie the financial responsibility to masculinity was common in both Zamalek and ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab. Interestingly, Aly and Sayyed from Zamalek described a woman who involved in monetized labor in order to provide for the house as a “man-wife” and “like a man” respectively, which provides insight about how “manhood” is attained thorough acting out particular performances that are tied to it (regardless of the gender of the person in question), such as being the sole provider for the family, as they expressed.

Furthermore, in the narrative of Sayyed from ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, his acceptance to resistance enacted by his children was tied to masculine/feminine social constructions. While he saw resistance on the side of one of his daughters as “humiliation,” he did not see disobedience from his sons as so. This is closely related to the ongoing attempts of some men to maintain their

“masculine” identities which they believe can be threatened by acts of resistance enacted by women. Another aspect that emerged in ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab’s narratives only was the role of violence in the construction of “manliness” as an identity. This was most significantly evident in the narratives of Sayyed and Nawal. In some cases, men, including Sayyed and Nawal’s husband, might resort to violence as a tool of punishing their wives who do not satisfy their “sexual, “physical,” or “emotional” desires (Dobash and Dobash, 1998). It can be said that violence, and the ability to exercise power over a female partner as a result of this violence, is a site through which the masculine identity is constructed (Anderson and Umberson, 2001, p. 359). To reiterate, and to build on Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity, men who resort to acts of violence suggest the “instability of masculine subjectivity” as the identity of the masculine only exists in the form of actions that individuals perform in conformance with a normative ideology of gender (p. 359). Another form of violence, verbal violence, was brought up by Nesreen as she mentioned that her husband sometimes shouts at her in front of the children so she feels “humiliated.” But as time went by, as she explained, a process of negotiation of renegotiation took place between her and her husband that changed that matter. At this point in their marriage, she actively agrees with him in front of the children or in public, and they hold discussions later on in private so that the children are not involved. She also uses her son as a means to negotiate with her husband as he “listens to him more,” as she said.

Gender division of labor, the valuation of housework, and the money complex

In Zamalek and ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab alike, the majority of the men and the women have attributed the financial responsibility to the man and the reproductive and household responsibility to the woman, and have justified this attribution through the employment of cultural and religious narratives. This indicates how gender as an institution of power and stratification organizes

acceptable female bodies and assigns reproductive work to the women (Amigot and Pujal, 2009, p. 650). This understanding of gender as a power system draws on Foucault's understanding of power as an apparatus for the production and regulation of life (biopower), and aims at individual bodies (Foucault, 1976 and Amigot and Pujal, 2009). But it is crucial to point out that my research has indicated that many women highly support this organization, try to reinforce it on other family members, and on their husbands. For instance, Umm Emad from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab upholds a system of gender division of labor in her sons' families; she has her daughters-in-law come to her house and do her laundry, and she is extremely critical of one of them who refuses to embody the role of the housewife. In many instances, when the man fails to conform to the normative task of breadwinning, he is met with absolute rejection, as the case of Azza clearly shows. But it is worth underscoring that there are multiple elements that can alter the division of labor model, including the economic aspect. For example, while Huda from Zamalek was completely against women's monetized labor, she found her daughter in-law's paid job to be crucial for the survival of her son's family particularly because he has been unemployed since the revolution. Also, Azza from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, albeit attributing the breadwinning role to the man, which was her main motive for remarrying twice, was forced to seek paid work after her third divorce to ensure survival of her family. While her paid job did not last for long due to medical reasons, the accounts of Huda and Azza underscore how economic needs can often modify gender beliefs about gender roles. This also applies to the case of Umm Emad's mother, whom she said worked very hard to help support her father, which sheds more light about how survival alters the gender division of labor model.

The modernist perspective that women gain power in the household when they have paid work was also brought up albeit almost only in the narratives of men from Zamalek. In some instances, the level of a woman's education was used interchangeably with monetized labor. This

is closely tied to how housework is valued, which was more often than not, assigned a much lesser ideological value than paid work. In 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, Sayyed was the only man who held a similar perspective to the men in Zamalek as he implied that monetized labor promotes the position of a woman within the household. Nevertheless, he expressed that he is against women's paid work as he saw a woman involved in monetized labor as difficult to "control." On the other hand, the only male interlocutor whose narrative expressed that he highly valued housework was Aly from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab. He saw his wife's work as a form of labor, and said that he believes paid work should not be more greatly valued than housework because housework is a "hundred times harder" than monetized work. He was critical of other men whom he sits with at the local coffeehouse as they significantly undervalue their wives' work. Not only that, but Aly proudly assumes childcare responsibilities, like milk-feeding, which underscores the possibility of transformation of normative connotations tied to the gender binary and the gender division of labor model. The high valuation of housework also applies to Omar's mother; it could be inferred from his account that her caregiving work within her family was highly valued, and was not considered of less importance than the paid job that his father had. In fact, he indicated that her caregiving role has enhanced her position in the family as he said that she is able "contain other family members" and play an active part in decision-making. But in most cases, it was not only the men who undervalued housework, but the women as well. The phenomenon of the devaluation of housework is interesting because reproduction activities are as important as production activities when it comes to the maintenance of the capitalist system. Husbands, in order to be able to produce, must be fed, sheltered and should be able to access subsistence necessities, as Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010) has argued. Therefore, the devaluation of housework underscores the reproduction an

unequal power structure within the family in which women are assigned more inferior positions given that they are primarily responsible for housework.

Nevertheless, this by no means aims to victimize women. In ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, most women I spoke with were housewives, and while their work was differently valued depending on their individual households, most of them (with the exception of Azza) said that their husbands are adequately providing for the household, and so they do not need to seek paid work. This also applies to the case of Huda from Zamalek, one of the only two housewives whom I spoke with in the area. Thus, it is worth emphasizing that that this model of division of labor does not mean that women are oppressed as dominant narratives suggest; my research has shown that most of the women have arrangements in their households that work for them, and that they frequently attempt to enforce the gender division of labor model on other family members. Importantly, when those arrangements do not suit them, they renegotiate, resist or conform based on their evaluation of their situation.

Notably, money was at the heart of gender relationships of power in the narratives of many of my Zamalek interlocutors, which I believe was the major difference between narratives from both neighborhoods. Aside from how some of them saw money as a means to enhance a woman’s position, money was a site through which Suzan exercised power. To recap, when Suzan was not happy with the “suspicious” actions of her past husband, she used a formal authorization certificate that her husband had issued her to sell some of his assets to herself while he was working in the Gulf. As I earlier pointed out, I am not in a position of making moral judgements, but it is worth looking at how Suzan used her spatial immobility to secure financial resources, even if were through ways that some might see as dubious. The money issue also emerged in the narrative of Salma, albeit in a different way. Salma was unsatisfied that she made more money than her

husband, as she tied the ability to make money to “manhood,” but she also said that she used her financial privilege as a tool of negotiation with her husband. Lastly, Farida was perhaps the only person whom I spoke with in Zamalek who said that she had financial issues. Her narrative showed that financial needs had made her stay in a marriage that she deemed as “oppressive,” which shows that the financial element affects the workings of power within the household.

Narratives of Sexuality, Honor, Safety and Morality

Albeit significantly more common among the ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab narratives, individuals from both Zamalek and ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab have reflected on gender ideology within the family through narratives of honor, sexuality, women’s safety, way of dress and morality. To draw on Day (2000, p. 109), gender identities are constructed in a way that commonly emphasizes the vulnerability of women and reinforces the idea that women are endangered in public spaces. In ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Sayyed has emphasized the need to monitor his wife’s and daughters’ sexuality and to safeguard their “honor,” partly through telling them to always wear a *gallabiyah*. He partly attributed the importance of his “monitoring role” to how people in the neighborhood would view his wife and daughters. Their “honor,” as his narrative has shown, is seen to represent his honor as a husband and father. He underscored his successful role in monitoring and safeguarding their honor, which in his point of view, is closely related to his identity as a man. Sayyed, similar to Nesreen, pointed to that the task of “guarding” a woman’s honor and sexuality is passed to the husband after marriage. In Nesreen’s account, she also pointed out how her elder brother took on the role of monitoring her and her sisters’ clothing from an early age. But with her daughters, she said that she is generally stricter about what they wear than her husband, which further points to how women play a significant role in reproducing narratives of gendered clothing. She also noted how she, along with her son and daughter’s fiancé, monitor her daughters’ online

activity, which shows how parents and male family members undertake the task of supervising girls' "morals." To Aly, monitoring the "appropriateness" of his wife's clothing was also significant. In fact, he said that it was the only element which he really fully "controls" in his marriage. He emphasized that it is "inappropriate" for people from the area to comment on his wife's clothing, which sheds some light about the role of the neighborhood in controlling women's clothing and in the creation of normative beliefs about what is women's "appropriate" clothing within families. The role of the neighborhood in the reproduction of the idea of modest clothing in households was also evident in Nawal's account. Significantly, Aly's four year-old son has taken on the responsibility of monitoring his mother's "morals" at this young age; he once saw his mother dancing to music on television and told her that she was being "inappropriate." Aly attributed this to his son "showing signs of manhood." Azza also underscored the importance of modest dress in her family, and emphasized the fear that as a girl's body develops, she is more likely to be harassed or even raped. She also underscored that "tradition" and "culture" dictate what a girl or woman can wear. Thus, dominant ideologies of gender, including gendered clothing, are normalized through cultural constructions (and dominant narratives that women are endangered and need protection), nevertheless those ideologies are most strongly constructed through rendering this process invisible and making the idea of change seem unthinkable. Azza also emphasized that 'Ishash Kum Ghurab is a relatively "safe" neighborhood due to the familiarity among its inhabitants, which makes her fear more for her daughters' safety when they leave the area. Among my Zamalek interlocutors, the idea of honor and sexuality most visibly emerged in the narratives of Salma and Sameh. To recall, Salma expressed that "girls are like a glass container that can break any minute. But with boys, they are like a rubber container that can bounce back up." This view implies that familial gender ideologies are linked to narratives of sexuality. Salma also emphasized

how she would fear that men would approach her daughter in public space, which points to how a girl's safety and virginity are elements that parents feel the need to monitor and guard. Additionally, Salma was the only person I spoke with in Zamalek who brought up the issue of clothing as she said that her husband has a significant say in what she can or cannot wear. I have related Salma's narrative to Macleod's (1992) work on middle-class women in which she argues that modest dress can be seen as founded on a conflicting statement of "both protest and accommodation," in which women assert their identities as wives and mothers while they embrace life outside the household as they seek paid work and education (p. 536, 547). Sameh also subscribes to the discourse of honor and sexuality as he underscored the need to monitor his daughter's morals, a task which he assigned to his son and that his wife heavily participates in. Similar to Sayyed, he believes that his daughter's honor is an extension of the family honor, which resonates with Baron's (2005) argument that in Egypt, women's morals are seen as indicative of family honor. Sameh also argued that women "maintain the reputation and position of the family and [the] husband," which implies a view that women are gatekeepers of the family and its "honor" and "stability." Additionally, Mahmoud from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab addressed sexuality albeit from a different perspective. He brought up the issue of sexuality and the way in which it relates to familial gender discourse production in the way he compared his relationship with his wife to his relationship with his past girlfriend. Mahmoud saw his wife, due to genital mutilation, as lacking multiple attributes that go beyond sexual desire. He described genital mutilation to have affected her ability to voice her opinion within the family and to express herself, along with other things. Thus, his account sheds some light about how sex and sexuality are a site through which gender ideology is produced within the family.

Women and men challenging dominant familial gender ideologies

Perhaps the most intriguing theme that was visible throughout my research in both Zamalek and 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr Al-Qadima is that both the women and the men actively challenged dominant familial gender ideologies. Interestingly, the people I spoke with in 'Ishash Kum Ghurab were perhaps more active in challenging those ideologies compared to their Zamalek counterparts, who in many instances chose to conform in order to maintain their positions, which they were frequently comfortable with. When I first met Aly from 'Ishash Kum Ghurab, he was milk-feeding his child, and was smoking a cigarette, both at the same time. He told me that he knows that he needs to maintain the image of the “tough man” in front of me, but that maintaining his “prestige” did not concern him. He also spoke about how he used to leave the coffeehouse to go home and help his toddler daughter defecate during the period when she had a medical condition that made it difficult to do so, and that his friends would make fun of him, but that it still did not concern him. He also actively chose not to reproduce his father's gender beliefs, which shows how those are fluid, ever-changing, and continuously challenged even by the men who often assume the more privileged position in familial hierarchies of power in the Egyptian family. In contrast to Sameh's narrative that pointed at the significance of upholding the image of masculinity in front of the social audience, Aly does not place much significance on whether he embodies the societal definition of the ideal “masculine” man. Nawal, who perhaps appeared to have a very marginal position in her household, also actively challenged her husband's desire to make her daughters wear *gallabiyahs*. She also challenged his desire to have his daughters leave school, and to constantly stay within the confined boundaries of the house. Mohamed from Zamalek, despite being much attached to the belief that women and men have different “paths” in life, as he put it, challenged dominant gender ideologies through his daughter, whom he sent to the US on her own to pursue her graduate studies. Farida has noted that her life experiences have changed the way

that she understands familial gender relations, and said that if her daughter decides to have a child outside of wedlock, she will not oppose her decision even though she is not completely convinced that it is “right.” Her opposition to her daughter’s idea of having a child outside of marriage was more about her fears about the difficulty of single-parenting than about moral disciplining. She did not place much emphasis on the importance of maintaining an intact hymen. Furthermore, Huda’s granddaughter often resists her grandmother’s desire to have her conform to normative gender ideologies, albeit in a sarcastic manner, through frequently telling her, “Oh my God, Grandma, [your beliefs] are as old as Hatshepsut’s!” I also spoke with Umm Emad who described herself as the “head” of the household, and who said that she has always been the most “powerful” figure in the family even when her husband was alive. She also began working with her father on the cart that he owned to support her siblings as she is the eldest daughter. When it came to helping her father with work, it did not matter that she had brothers who could assume this responsibility, it only mattered that she was the eldest. Furthermore, some individuals contest dominant gender ideologies through employing certain strategies that enable them to do so while maintaining an image of gender conformance. For example, Soha mentioned that while her husband has to consult with her on all matters, she has to pretend that she agrees with everything that he says in front of his family and then discuss it later with him in private. Additionally, in some cases, life situations in the everyday result in significant changes in how gender is performed in the household. In the case of Azza, it can be said that a process of feminization of her household took place after her third divorce; she said that she now plays “the role of the man and the woman.” Despite her initial resistance to becoming the head of the household mainly because she sought financial support from a husband, she was forced to assume this position after her three marriages ended.

Concluding notes

My thesis has attempted to fill a research gap through looking at how gender is made and remade in two economically and socially distinct areas; ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, Misr-Al Qadima and Zamalek. As earlier mentioned, most (if not all) ethnographies on the Egyptian household tend to focus on lower income communities. Perhaps the first difference that caught my attention was how some of the people whom I spoke with in Zamalek were inclined towards maintaining their “positions” in how they conveyed their stories as opposed to their ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab counterparts. In other words, I had to put a lot more effort into gaining the trust of the Zamalek interlocutors as opposed to the ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab interlocutors. This provides insight about the workings of class. Importantly, while it is possible to point out a few differences in the way in which gender is produced and reproduced in families in Zamalek and ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, as I have outlined throughout chapter four, it is impossible to sketch a model of how gender is performed and constructed in families in each of the two areas. As my research has indicated, power relations within the family are highly complex and are far from being homogeneous. It is worth noting, however, that the difference in income levels has shown to impact how individuals understand and reproduce gender within the family. In Zamalek, money was involved in the most intimate complexities of family politics. In ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab, however, the theme of money did not emerge as much, except in moments when individuals discussed survival tactics vis-à-vis gender. Furthermore, while it was common in Zamalek for individuals to conform to existing familial systems of power in order to maintain their positions, accounts of resistance more frequently emerged in the ‘Ishash Kum Ghurab narratives. But in both areas, the family emerged as a site through which gender is simultaneously reproduced, and challenged. The family, despite being commonly understood as a natural entity though it is a mere social construct (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 21), did not act as an institution within which gender ideologies and norms are

mechanically passed on, but as a site of active conformance and resistance. While it emerged as a means through which the masculine/feminine binary and the gender division of labor model are frequently reproduced, it is a space through which gender ideologies continually transform and evolve, and where a battle over positions of power can be continually witnessed.

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